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[“NOW,” THE GIRL ASSERTED, “IF I'M TO BE TALKED TO, I'M READY!”]

TWICE CHOSEN.

CHAPTER III.

LORD CARRUTHERS' OFFER.

THREE years passed rapidly by, leaving no special landmarks behind, but bringing with them the flight the natural changes which needs must be in this impossible-to-stand-still world.

Adela Thorndyke had grown more beautiful; the child was exchanged for the woman, and yet there were glimpses of Scamp still discernible in the outbreaks of wilfulness and sudden perversities—in the old mischievous, half-naughty, wholly winning ways, in which she had won hearts to her.

And she went on winning them. She had more lovers at her feet than any girl in the county, and one of them was now a subject of contest between her and her father. Lord Carruthers was all which a girl's fancy might picture—tall, well-made, and handsome; rich,

pleasant, and honourable; and yet Adela would not accept him.

He had been that very morning to the Rectory, and had enlisted Mr. and Mrs. Thorndyke's sympathies in his suit.

They were both exceedingly pleased at the prospect of having so charming a man for a son-in-law, and gave him a warm and hearty permission to ask their daughter for her love, with but little doubt as to the result, as they looked upon the man's animated face.

Adela was reading in the self-same tent which she had three years before pronounced stifling, and there his lordship found her, having left the Rector and his wife with glad hearts in the study of the former.

“Adela is a very lucky girl!” said Mrs. Thorndyke, when the door closed upon their visitor; “we could never have hoped for a better match.”

“No, indeed, it will relieve my mind of a great weight. I am not a rich man, as you know, and I feel my health to be failing; it will be a real happiness to me to see our child well settled in life.”

“And to me also; but Edward, you must

not talk of failing health at your age. Why you are not fifty yet, and I could not spare you, my dear!” and she laid a gentle hand upon his arm.

“You would not be asked. You see, wife when a man's time comes, whether he be old or young, rich or poor—has dear ones who would fain keep him, or none to mourn his loss—he must obey when he is called from hence.”

“May you not be called then, Edward!” she said with a sad smile, and he had stooped and kissed her.

“If I were not here, dear, Adela would ask you to make your home with her, I am sure,” he continued; “and I should die content to know that you were both provided for.”

“But, Edward, you are surely not ill?” replied his wife, tears welling to her eyes.

“Perhaps not,” he returned, with a strange smile. “I hope I may be spared; I am not tired of my life, Mary, dear.”

She slipped her fingers into his, and they stood by the window, hand in hand, watching the tent upon the lawn.

“Adela has rejected many good offers, but

she can expect nothing better than to become Lady Carruthers," said the Rector, abruptly leaving the former subject. "I suppose she will come in and tell us her good news, dear little Scamp! I am thankful she is to have a happy lot. With a disposition like hers she will feel both the joys and the troubles of life acutely. As Carruthers' wife, few of the latter will, I hope, come in her way. And now I must see to my sermons. This is Saturday, and I am seldom so late with them, but I have felt disinclined to buckle to, to write or think, all the week, and now Scamp's lucky fortune has unsettled me; but I must use my will, and put thoughts aside, that is, secular ones," he added, with a smile, turning to his table, and sitting down before a quire of half foolscap.

"May I sit with you, Edward?" asked his wife. "I won't talk to disturb you, and perhaps Lord Carruthers will come back himself to tell us. I should like to be here if he does."

"Very well, Mary," said Mr. Thorndyke, "I don't feel inspired to begin yet," he ended, with a smile, "so you will not hinder me, I daresay."

But Lord Carruthers did not return. He found Adela sitting alone in the tent, leaning back in a lounge chair, with a neat little shoe and highbred instep peeping from the folds of her cream-coloured dress.

She was looking sweetly pretty, her fair skin catching a tinge from the ruby velvet with which her costume was trimmed, and her well-turned wrists and white hands fully shown beneath her half-cut sleeves, trimmed with falling lace.

Her averse eyes wore a far-off look, and she started when Lord Carruthers stood before her, and a slight expression of vexation crossed her speaking face; but the next moment she had risen, and received him, if not with warmth, yet with politeness.

"Did you not find my parents in?" she asked, as she indicated a chair.

"Yes, I have seen both Mr. and Mrs. Thorndyke," he replied, "and have had a pleasant interview with them, and now I have come to torment you, Miss Adela. I am a humble petitioner!"

She looked up, inquiringly, no shadow of his meaning falling across her mind. She wanted to be alone—to think, as his visit was unacceptable, that was all.

"A petitioner!" she repeated, smiling. "Well, Lord Carruthers, you may be that, but don't ask me to picture you a humble one, at any rate, for I could not do it."

"Could you not? And yet a man must needs plead humbly, when he is asking for his life's happiness!" returned his lordship, gravely.

She did not answer him, and a flush rose to her cheek, as he continued,—

"Adela, you surely cannot be taken by surprise at this avowal. You must have seen that ever since I came from abroad last year I have loved you."

"I have not seen it," she returned, hastily. "Had I done so—"

He interrupted her.

"Hear me out, dear girl. Your parents have given me permission to speak freely to you, and have desired me to tell you that they wish nothing better than to see you my wife!"

She turned very pale, but did not again attempt to check his words, and he drew his chair close to her side.

"Adela, you are the love of my life!" he continued, earnestly. "Will you come and be its brightness? My dear old place will be no home to me without the woman of my heart to share it with me; to joy with me in my joys, and to sorrow with me in my sorrows. You will be my wife!" and he took the soft white hand into his own.

"I cannot," she said gently. "Forget that you have asked what I must refuse."

"And why?" he queried with emotion.

"Because, Lord Carruthers, I do not love you. We have been good friends; let us remain so, please."

"Adela, do you love anyone else?" he asked, with sudden pain.

"I do not know that I do," she returned, thoughtfully. "A preoccupied heart is not the only reason for not caring for a man in that way."

"Then you do not forbid me to hope?"

"Yes, I do. It is of no use for you to let hope tell you a flattering tale, Lord Carruthers. I like you too well ever to love you," she added quaintly. "And now think of it no more!" And she looked honestly in his face, pressed the hand which held hers, and quietly withdrew it from his clasp.

"Not think of it!" he echoed. "Adela, you can never have loved to speak thus lightly."

"Perhaps not," she answered. "But I think I should have the strength of will to forget, if I tried."

"No, no, not if your love were as deep as mine for you, dear girl! I have so hoped; my every thought of the future has been filled with pictures of our joint happiness; our mutual joys; and now you say forget, as though the word held no pain for me!"

"I am sorry to put you to pain," she replied, laying her hand upon his coat-sleeve; "but it is harder to tell you the truth at once than to let you dream of a future which can never be realized. Some other girl, more worthy of your love than I am, will brighten your home and cheer your heart with a fuller affection than I could give you, and make you a better and more yielding wife. I should have to love very deeply to make a man even fairly happy. I am wilful and exacting by nature, and intolerant of control. It is all right here at home; they do not discover my faults, because I always have my own way. With a husband it would be different."

"Adela, if that be all, let us try. You shall have your own way, my darling. Heaven knows that I should wish it!"

"No, it would not do. I should despise you if you were weak; and yet I feel that you could never be my master!"

"You would resent it if a man attempted to become that, surely?"

"Certainly, if I knew it—I should kick over the traces at once," she said, with a laugh. "Lord Carruthers, if ever my love is won, and kept, the gainer will be a very clever man. His reins must be of the finest silk, and strong as iron. If once I see them, good-bye to his influence! Don't you think you are well out of it, my friend?" and she gave him a bright, heart-whole look.

"No, I do not. I believe you to be high-spirited, but as true as steel; you will not scare me with your sketches of character. I shall watch, and wait, and hope still."

"Do not," she entreated; "it will only end in disappointment!"

"Adela, I value the prize too much to give it up without a struggle," he said, earnestly. "I can never turn aside from seeking you while you are free."

Then he held out his hand to her, and as she laid hers upon it he stooped impulsively, and touched it with his lips.

The action had been as quick as it was decided, and the girl had no time to show annoyance, for no sooner did she recognize the fact that he had kissed her hand than she knew that he was gone.

"Edward," said Mrs. Thorndyke, suddenly, "Lord Carruthers is going away. See he is making for the gate, and he looks upset; I do hope Adela has not refused him."

"Refused him! impossible! my dear!" but he pushed his virgin paper aside, and did not appear so assured as his words seemed to imply.

"But he is gone!" continued the Rector's wife in agitation.

Mr. Thorndyke joined her at the window.

Yes! his lordship was gone! There was no sign of him anywhere, and the gate was swinging to and fro, as if it had been opened and shut with haste and impatience.

"I wish I knew what she has said to him," went on Mrs. Thorndyke, uneasily.

"Very well, my dear, let us go and find out. It is impossible for me to write with my mind in this state of uncertainty and chaos—I shall have no sermon ready for to-morrow."

"Never mind, preach an old one," returned his wife, with a smile.

"Turn over the tub, eh! Well, I believe many men do so once a year—one old clergyman I knew, told me honestly that was his system, and his parishioners knew his sermons by heart, and would tell you what was coming each Sunday."

He was putting his papers together as he spoke, then opened the French window, and slipping his hand through his wife's arm, proceeded with her to the tent.

They spoke as they walked along, and their voices reached Adela.

She sat up with an *eveillé* look, scenting opposition.

"When Greek meets Greek," she murmured. "They will seek to persuade me that it would be for my good—and they may be right—but Adela Thorndyke never breaks her word. I promised to wait! I can hold my own against papa."

By that time the Rector stood in the entrance of the tent, and was looking at her gravely.

"Adela, why did you not keep Lord Carruthers to luncheon?" he asked.

"I? I don't usually issue invitations without knowing your views, papa," she said, carelessly. "Had you wanted him to remain I suppose you would have asked him yourself!"

"We expected to meet him again, dear," began Mrs. Thorndyke; "we were greatly astonished to see him going out at the gate!"

"I don't know why you should be! He does not often stay to meals—he is not a tame cat, like Horace!"

"Like Horace I certainly not," retorted the Rector. "Carruthers is a very different class of man."

"I have nothing whatever to say against him," replied the girl coldly.

"Against him? I should think not; there is nothing but good to be said of him!"

"I did not know he was such a prime favorite," she returned, with a smile. "Now, Horace—"

"We do not want to talk of young Lake," said Mr. Thorndyke, irritably. "He is a very good sort of young fellow, but if he were to ask for your hand to-morrow I should say no, to him."

"Without reference to my views?" and she let her eyes meet his.

"I should think such reference unnecessary. You could not consider Horace a suitable husband?"

"How do you know, papa? Did you ask any one's opinion when you chose mamma?"

"No, I did not, but the cases are different."

"Different! What, because you are a man, and I a woman? I cannot see it in that light. We have as much to lose or win in choosing husbands as you can possibly have in selecting wives; but it is just like you lords of the creation, to think we should be bought and sold like slaves."

"Adela! if I really thought you loved Horace Lake, if I considered him necessary to your happiness," began her father, in agitation, "I would put my own wishes aside."

"And let me have him?"

"I could not cloud your life."

"You old dear!" she cried, starting to her feet. "I only wanted to make you say something sweet and nice. I knew you would if I ran you in a corner," and she threw her arms about him in her old impulsive way.

"And do you care for him, my child?"

"Care for him, you wise old thing, of course not," she cried, again smothering him

with kisses. "I only care for you, and you ought to know it, and you will find it very difficult to get rid of me I can assure you."

A look of pleasure rested for a moment upon his face, but he quickly dismissed it.

"My dear, you are fencing," he said. "You led me cleverly off the track with your will-o'-the-wisp Horace, but it won't do; you know as well as I do that your mother and I did not come here to talk to you of him."

"No?" she answered with well affected surprise. "Well, if you are going to remain for a chat you must have this cosy chair," and she pressed her father into it with gentle strength, while she drew her mother to the only other seat the tent contained; and having made her sit down, flung herself at their feet with a graceful movement, rested her head against her mother's knee, and slipped her hand into her father's. "Now," she asserted, "If I'm to be talked to, I'm ready!"

"Why did Lord Carruthers go away, Adela?" questioned her mother, smoothing the girl's bright hair.

"That is best known to himself," she returned, a flush creeping to her fair cheeks. "One does not usually ask a gentleman why he comes, or for what reason he leaves, when he pays a morning visit."

"Adela," said her father, "your badinage is irritating. We came to ask you a simple question, and we want a sensible answer."

"Oh! like that, dad, are you?" she said, smiling up at him. "I'm so sorry, for I know by myself one feels bad in that condition, and I'm quite sure Lord Carruthers is not worth one unpleasant word between us."

"I am grieved to hear you say so; he is a very fine fellow, and I like him immensely."

"So do I, for the matter of that; he is nice enough, take him all round."

"My dear child," stroked in Mrs. Thorndyke, in a deprecating voice, "do be serious!"

"Never was more so in my life, even during one of dad's best sermons. I'm deeply interested—deeply!"

"Adela! you're enough to provoke a saint!" exclaimed the Rector, hotly.

"Meaning you, dear dad?" she laughed, brightly.

"I really shall be very angry with you," he began with veritable annoyance; but Adela was now on her knees before him, her golden head upon his shoulder, her soft white hand smoothing out his card marks.

"No! you never were that in your life, darling!" she said, softly. "I'm still your own little Scamp, and I never shall be. It is too late to change now, dad, and she raised her saucy eyes to him, full of love and confidence.

"Small with!" he muttered; "it must have been just such a girl as you who made poor St. Anthony look up from his good books. Scamp! will you ever be a woman, and face the stern realities of life?"

"Soon enough," she returned, sadly. "I don't want to begin before I can help it."

"But Lord Carruthers," reminded Mrs. Thorndyke, breaking in.

"Off the line again! Adela, what a tactician you are! Yes, Lord Carruthers. Why do you lead me from the subject?"

"Simply because I do not wish to broach it. His lordship is nothing to us; why should we talk of him? People are not pleasant themes of conversation—it is too personal!"

"Of course it is personal," said her mother. "Adela, Lord Carruthers asked our consent to his proposing to you."

"That was very straightforward of him," she returned, approvingly.

"Of course it was."

Then there was silence.

"Well?" resumed Mrs. Thorndyke, interrogatively.

Adela looked at her.

"And did he?" continued her mother.

"It is rather a mean advantage to take of a man to tell of an offer, is it not?" she returned with hesitation.

"Certainly not, in this case," replied her father. "He proposed, of course! And you?"

"I was highly flattered, equally of course. Now don't you think I should jump at the chance of becoming a countess?" she asked, wickedly.

"I should hope you were not mad enough to refuse such a man, with such a position," returned her father, warmly.

"Is there any insanity in our family?" she asked, quaintly.

"Insanity! Why?"

"Because I did refuse Lord Carruthers, papa—refused him absolutely and irrevocably. I did not say 'no' in a manner which meant 'ask me again,' but I told him plainly it could never be."

"Adela, it is too bad of you," said Mrs. Thorndyke, veritable tears starting to her eyes.

"You will never get such a chance again, and we wished it so very much."

"Do you really want to get rid of me, mamma?" asked the girl, her smile dying out.

"No, child, not to get rid of you," replied her father, not unkindly; "but to throw away such an opportunity really does seem a pity, and Carruthers is such a good fellow. I'm sure he expected his dismissal as little as I did. What reason did you give him for your refusal?"

"I do not love him, father, and I told him honestly that I never should do so."

"How can you tell that?" said Mrs. Thorndyke, eagerly. "Love grows, and yours may do so."

"No. Love is an inspiration, not a growth," she replied, in a low voice. "It comes without your will or knowledge. It cannot be cultivated, believe me."

"And pray what do you know about it?" asked the Rector, regarding his daughter in surprise. "I'm aware you have had lots of fellows after you, but you have assured me you do not care for any of them."

"Nor do I."

"Yet you have your definition of the article by heart!"

She had flushed beneath his scrutiny, but she was not beaten.

"You forgot the yellow-coloured novels," she laughed; "it is easy to borrow sentiment."

"Very easy," he answered tartly. "Adela, some day I hope you will become more sensible. Carruthers will not give you up lightly. I know the man, and I yet hope to see you his wife!"

"Yes!" chimed in her mother, "it would make us very happy, dear. Try and like him, there's a good girl!"

"Fancy trying to like one's future husband," she laughed. "No, no, it really would be that, mamma. Put the idea from your heads, you two old dears—I shall never become Lady Carruthers!"

CHAPTER IV.

"I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN!"

ADELA THORNDYKE had heard but little of the man she loved during the past three years, but she knew she was not forgotten by him, for in every letter he wrote to her father, he sent her a kindly message, not warm enough to raise a suspicion of the truth in the Rector's mind, but sufficient to let the girl know that she was remembered.

Not once had he penned a line to her direct, and yet Adela felt he would come back, if she kept her word and waited. As if to reward her for her faith in him, scarcely had her parents left her than a servant came and placed a missive in her hands, and her heart leaped, for she knew the writing.

It was from Cecil Egerton, now promoted to the rank of Major! It was not a foreign letter, as those to her father had hitherto been, but written upon ordinary paper, and stamped with a penny stamp; moreover, it bore the postmark of London.

Long the girl gazed at it in a tremor of happy doubt. Was Cecil really in England

when she had believed him far away in the sunny East?

After awhile she broke the seal with eager fingers and read the following lines:

"MY DEAR MISS THORNDYKE—

"I have been very ill, and have been sent home to England on sick leave. Will there be a welcome for me at Winsthorpe if I come down? I do not mean from my old friend the Rector, but from the bright-eyed child with whom I smoked the calumet of peace in the ancient walnut tree. Scamp, have you kept your promise? If not, never again could I bear to visit the old place, haunted by memories of your winsome ways! Send me one line to the Army and Navy Club, Piccadilly, and by it I will be guided, whether I inform the Rector of my return or no.—Yours ever,

"CECIL EGERTON."

Adela sat gazing at the lines before her, her heart filled with a deep joy, when a merry laugh sounded close at hand, and Lilian Freemandt stood before her.

"I have been watching you," she said.

"Spy!" retorted Adela, with a bright look. "Were you repaid for your trouble?"

"Amply; I've learnt a secret, Scamp! how sly you have been!"

"I? I do not understand you!"

"Don't you? Dela, who is that letter from?"

A deep flush suffused the fair girl's face, as the dark eyes of the other were fixed upon her, and Adela did not reply.

"It is short for a love letter," continued the young lady, with an air of authority; "but it is one for all that."

"Oh! you know that, from the vantage ground of your superior knowledge."

"Of course I do; have you any news for me, dear?"

"Regarding yourself? No, not to-day, Lilian. You must not be greedy, and he must not be imprudent. If I received too many letters, it might be commented upon; there are disadvantages in growing up!"

Lilien sighed. "If it were not for you, dear old girl, I should be utterly miserable. He is coming home, but I shall not be allowed to see him, unless you can manage it for me!"

"I'll do my best."

"You always do, you dear old pet; and now about yourself. Why were you looking so strangely happy when I caught you, Dela?"

"Because I felt so," she returned, shyly.

"Is that all I am to hear?"

"Yes, that is all to-day."

"Shall I know more soon?"

"I hope so."

Then the two girls waited, each for the other to speak.

"Adela," said Lilien, after a pause, "do you know people are saying you will be Lady Carruthers some day. What a lovely little countess you would make!"

"Do they? Well they are mistaken, Lil," she answered, quietly; "the position wouldn't suit me at all, and Lord Carruthers knows it as well as I do!"

"I am so sorry. Then you don't think he will ask you?"

"I am sure he won't," she returned, with a smile.

"Then I can't think who it can be with, Dela, but there's no doubt he's in love; he's so absent you can't keep his attention fixed!"

"Perhaps it's with you, Lil!"

"With me? No, my affections are settled!"

"But he is not to know that."

"I'm sure he might, by my manner."

"Your manner! Why, you're the veriest little flirt I ever saw!"

"You're a nice sort of friend, Dela," she laughed. "If I'm a flirt, what are you?"

"I'm not sure. Do I flirt?"

"Rather! why, how you make Horace bow down to you!"

"Oh! yes of course; he knows which side his bread is buttered."

"So do most people, but it is not that. Horace loves you for yourself!"

Then the girl suddenly looked up.

"What has become of the handsome Captain, who was here three years ago? You never mention him, Adela, and I have meant to ask over and over again!"

"Oh! he's a Major now!" she returned, with burning cheeks.

Lilian looked at her keenly, then broke into a silvery laugh.

"Lie the wind that way?—in the East, eh? He went to Indis, did he not? If you won't give me full information concerning him I shall ask the Rector, and tell him the reason for my interest in him."

"And what is your reason?"

"Your blushes, Adela. Shall I consult your father as to their origin?"

"Don't, Lilian. I'll tell you all I know—Major Egerton has returned to England."

"And is coming down?" cried the other, eagerly.

"I never said so."

"No, your tongue did not, but your cheeks did. Adela, I've known you too long—you can't deceive me. I daresay that letter was from him! Was it?"

"Perhaps."

"And was it that made you happy?"

"I won't be confessed," she cried, starting to her feet, and placing the letter in her pocket. "Come in and have lunch with us, and I will walk home with you afterwards."

"Will you? You are nice. I should like both of all things."

"Well, then, that is settled. To tell you the truth, I am rather in disgrace to-day, and I shall hail your presence at luncheon as a godsend."

"Bad Scamp! What have you done now? Your parents are such old dears, I cannot take your part if you have vexed them. You should live with my father for a week; he would make you jump!"

"No, he wouldn't; I should manage him," she laughed.

"Well, confess; what have you done? If you don't I'll ask Mrs. Thorndyke."

"She would not tell you if you did; and now, dear, come in."

The two girls went into the house, and Lilian Freemantle took off her hat and jacket. She was decidedly a handsome brunette, and made a striking contrast to Adela's fair beauty.

Her eyes were dark and sparkling, fringed with long black lashes; her complexion olive-hued, warmly tinted with carmine; her face oval, her teeth dazzlingly white and somewhat large.

In fact, she was altogether an attractive, dashing-looking girl, and one not to be passed by without notice.

As soon as luncheon was over, which somehow lacked the ease which pervaded the household generally, Mr. Thorndyke retired to his study, and after a few minutes Adela crept away to write to Major Egerton.

She only sent him one line; but it took her a long time to make up her mind what to say, and longer still to decide that what she had written would do.

She merely wrote:—

"I have not forgotten," and signed it "Scamp."

Lilian Freemantle was the best hearted girl alive; but she was decidedly inquisitive, and Adela had scarcely left the room when she really did ask Mrs. Thorndyke what was the matter. And she, poor woman! was but too ready to get a listener to her troubles to withhold her confidence; and before Adela returned, Lilian had heard the whole story of Lord Carruther's offer, and her rejection of him.

When the two girls went upstairs to put on their hats Lilian took her friend by both hands, and looked her full in the face.

"Oh! you sly young puss!" she said, her dark eyes dancing. "I know how you vexed your parents this morning! How could you refuse such a man as Lord Carruthers?"

"Who says I ever had the chance?"

"Come, my dear, give up trying to deceive me! I have heard the whole story from Mrs. Thorndyke! It is useless!"

"It was not fair of mother at all!" returned Adela, warmly. "If I were a man I should deeply resent a girl's telling I had proposed to her!"

"So should I! But you have not done so!"

"No; but mamma has!"

"It is safe with me, Adela. You might have trusted me."

"No, Lilian, not with other people's secrets!"

"But you were so sly about it!"

"Was I? Then it was not for my own sake!"

"Why, you made out he did not care for you!"

"No, not quite that! I said he would not ask me to be his countess!"

"Because you had already refused."

"Just so!"

"Deceitful—decidedly!" said Lilian, with mock gravity. "And oh! Adela, how could you? It would have been such a splendid match!"

"Yes! of course it would! I appreciate its advantages; but I cannot avail myself of them!"

"Ah! I see! You are too romantic to desire baronial halls, and all that sort of thing! You want love in a cottage, and Cupid as cook and housemaid. Usual food, which mounts up butcher's and baker's bills, will not be required. You will live on the sweets of life, and thrive on them, pronouncing yourself intently happy in your lover's elysium."

"Lover's fiddlesticks! Don't talk such nonsense, Lil, or I shall think you moonstruck!" said Adela, laughing. "No, I am afraid I too well appreciate the good things of this life; but they may be too dearly bought! Lilian, it makes me tremble to think what I should do if I were married to a man and found I did not love him. I verily believe I should do something dreadful—cut my throat, perhaps!"

"Or his?" coolly suggested the other.

"That would be more satisfactory by far!"

Then the two pairs of eyes met.

"Lil, what nonsense you talk!" said Adela, with a smile.

"My dear, the same thought was passing through my brain concerning you!" replied Lilian Freemantle, smiling too. "And now if you have finished titivating, we had better start. My! you are a time dressing; and I have a stern parent at home, remember!"

"I like you, Lil."

"Of course you do, but what called forth the sentiment on this especial occasion?"

"Why, you have been standing before the glass ever since you came upstairs, gazing at yourself from time to time like a female Narcissus! and I verily believe, like him, enraptured with your charms; while poor little I have had to dress in the corner, regardless of my hat being all on one side!"

"With your brain to match, Dela?"

"You're complimentary!"

"Not at all. I asked for information. Have you answered that letter? I suppose you stole away for that purpose after lunch?"

"And thinking me safely out of the way, you treacherously pumped my dear, weak-minded mother, and made her commit a breach of confidence?"

"Not a bit of it. I was doing you a friendly action!"

"Me. How?"

"Why, if I had not kept Mrs. Thorndyke amused she would soon have wanted to know what had become of her ewe lamb; and would probably have sought you, and found you writing love-letters."

"I have not been writing love-letters, and mamma is in better training than that!"

"Oh, is she? I wish my father was!"

"You give way to him too much, Lil," decided Adela, buttoning up her glove.

"I'm obliged to do so. He scares me. He

makes such a noise if I don't obey him at once."

"Why don't you make a noise too? He would soon get tired of it."

Lilian looked at her with open-eyed wonder.

"My dear, the place would be like a bear-garden. I couldn't!"

"It would be an unpleasant sort of remedy for you both, perhaps, but it would cure him. You allow him to be quite a tyrant to you?"

"That is really substantially true, with the exception of my allowing him to do it. I'm awfully afraid of father!"

"I'm not a bit!"

"It is well that you are not. Dela, would you beard the lion in his den? Would you come to my rescue, if ever he found out?" she said, earnestly, laying her hand on her friend's shoulder.

"Of course, I would. I will go and ask his consent now if you like?"

"No, that would never do. My boy must get on first. He must have enough to keep the wolf from the door without help from papa. I'm not sentimental, Dela, but the cottage would content me very well with him."

"Oh! And Cupid as chef de cuisine," laughed Adela.

"My dear, I really must go," announced Lilian decidedly.

"In other words, you prefer to change the subject," suggested Adela. "Well! I'm a generous enemy; I'll let you off. I've been ready this half-hour—but you are such a girl to talk."

"Talk! Why I can't get in a word edge-ways if you're within a mile, and you know it!"

"I know you're a horrid little wretch!" cried Adela, catching her, and giving her what she called a bear's hug. "And I cannot imagine what he or anyone else can see in you!"

"My dear Dela," retorted Lilian, "it is a mystery to me why Major Egerton—" but Lilian Freemantle's speech ended suddenly, for her friend had made a rush for the door, and had flown downstairs like a lapwing, to avoid the retaliation she knew she deserved, and Lilian had to follow her without finishing her broken sentence.

Mrs. Thorndyke was in the passage.

"What! are you going, girls?" she asked, as she saw their outdoor garments.

"Yes, indeed; I expect I shall be scolded as it is. I didn't know I should stay here to lunch."

"Tell Sir Richard to scold me instead," said Adela. "I should rather like it for a change."

"That's a challenge, Mrs. Thorndyke," remarked Lilian! "You spoil Dela!"

"I don't feel sure you are not right," returned the Rector's wife, half sadly.

"Send her to the hall for a month. Papa will get her into fine order for you."

"Would he?" replied Adela, with dilated nostrils, and a defiant look. "I'm not so easily kept in order, I assure you!"

Then she turned and laid her cheek against her mother's with a loving gesture.

"We never try that sort of thing on, mummy dear, do we?" she said.

"I don't think it would be of much use, my child," replied Mrs. Thorndyke, kissing her.

"And we quite understand each other, don't we?" continued the girl, coaxingly.

"Yes, generally, dear; and now good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Thorndyke. May I come again soon?" asked Lilian.

"Certainly, my dear; we are always pleased to see you," and after a friendly kiss the Rector's wife watched them down the drive and out of the gate.

"Your mother's a dear old thing!" said Lilian, warmly.

"That she is, especially when she lets out my secrets," said Adela, wickedly. "And now Lil, do you know how far I am going with you?"

"I know how far I should like you to go."
"And how far is that?"
"Why, all the way, of course, but I know as well as possible where you will stop."
"Where?" demanded the other.
"At the post-office, of course."
"Why should I? There's a letter-bag at home!"

"A letter-bag at home!" echoed Lilian.
"Of course there is; so there is at the Hall, but these are only for *ordinary letters*, my dear child!"

"Oh! that is how you manage, is it?"
"You know how I manage everything. I'm not so close as you are, Della."

"I'll go right home with you if you like, Lil. So much for your suspicions."

Lilian looked at her watch.
"All right, you will still be in time for the post on your way back," she laughed.

"The post! You're post mad," said Adela.
"I've a good mind not to go another step with you," but she went on for all that as far as the massive gates of Marsden Hall, and as she returned she walked close by the wall of the post-office, and dropped a letter into the box.

(To be continued.)

"SUMMER'S GONE."

"Dust on thy mantle! Dust,
Bright Summer, on thy livery of green!
A tarnish as of rust,
Dims thy late brilliant sheen;
And all thy glories—leaf, and bud, and flower—
Change cometh over them with every hour."

Not without sensation of sadness do we witness this change—for, gentle and gradual as it may be, 'tis always with a sigh of regret that we see the beautiful fade and die away. And thus have faded the flowers—

"The fair young flowers, that lately sprung and stood,
In brighter light and softer airs, a beauteous sisterhood."

And how we miss the trees!—the broad shadows cast by their bounteous foliage when, upon a rare and chance occasion, we visit some well-known sylvan spot; while within doors even greater is the loss—for gone with the summer is that screen of greenery, which, by a sublime "make-believe," gave an ideal of seclusion, and a shutting away of the outer world from sight.

Hood, whose verse ever alternated from the mournful to the gladsome, asks, in a poet's reverie :

"Where are the blooms of summer? In the West,
Blushing their last to the last sunny hours.
Where is the pride of summer—the green prime—

The many, many leaves all twinkling? Where—"

And, wonderingly, we, too, question—

"And is the swallow gone?
Who beheld it?
Which way sailed it?
Farewell bade it none?"

Yes, with the prescience unequalled by the vaunted knowledge of humanity, they also are gone with the summer, "have winged across the main" to their sweet, summer homes. The wise little birds! They would not stay to perish with cold and hunger in our changeable clime.

Gone, too, is the brilliant butterfly and all the sportive ephemera, whose frail existence is of such brief duration.

Yet, with our benison on the memory of your sunny days and moonlight nights, *vale, sweet Summer!*

THE tempered light of the woods is like a perpetual morning, and is stimulating and heroic. The anciently reported spells of these places creep on us. The incommunicable trees begin to persuade us to live with them, and quit our life of solemn trifles.

BE TRUE TO ONE.

—o—

FLIET not, little beauty,
Though some may have said,
"Your face is your fortune;
Choose well ere you wed."
Remember this, maiden,
So Rumour asserts:
A man seldom marries
The woman who flirts.

Don't say it is pastime,
A joke, or mere fun;
A woman's white soul
Is like snow in the sun.
Love's pure rays will melt it
To tears or to smiles;
But dust from the highway
And byway defiles.

When once you have chosen
The man of all men,
Who loves you most dearly—
And you love—why, then,
Look out, and not trifle,
Or let your thoughts rove
To other admirers—
So sacred is *love*.

With hands clasped together,
And heart meeting heart,
Oh, what is there like it
In nature or art?
The angels beholding,
The sight would not miss,
Of two thus united
In conjugal bliss.

Stoop not, little maiden,
From heights where you stand;
You hold a high place
In our beautiful land—
A fair maiden now,
Sweet, true wife by-and-by;
And mother, perhaps;
What queen stands so high?

M. A. K.

A TRUE REVENGE.

—o—

CHAPTER XVI.—(continued.)

"Aye, my proud, ambitious beauty, I wish you all the happiness you deserve while abroad, and when you are established here again my turn will come!"

There was an ugly light upon the stern old face as he spoke those words, but they quickly faded, as a thought of his pure gentle darling crossed his mind.

Meanwhile, the carriage, containing the two so newly wedded, dashed lightly along the slushy streets, now alive with vehicles of all descriptions, but they heeded not the outside world; each was flushed with exultation at the fulfilment of their brightest hopes.

"Una, my darling wife!" cried Lord Graydon, bending forward suddenly, and drawing her to him. "Have you no word to say to me?"

"George!" was her reproofing reply, but she managed, with her usual tact and by means of her rare fascinating smile, to rob the tone of its sting, and he smiled half sancily as he took her slender hand in his and stroked it tenderly.

"Since my lady is so dignified, I must content myself with your hand, wishing like Romeo that I were 'that glove upon that hand!'" he returned softly; and Una turned her large dark eyes upon him with a world of love slumbering in their depths.

"Uncle did not seem very well," observed Una, after a short pause, during which the carriage had nearly reached its destination.

"No! He struck me as being peculiarly distract," was George's reply. Then, as if the thought had just occurred to him, which in truth it had, he added, "By-the-bye, Una,

what did that Italian woman say to you? I saw her face, and guessed it was not very pleasant by its expression."

A swift and sudden change came over the beautiful smiling face. The smile vanished, and in its place there came a look, half dread, half passion. What if that woman's words were true? Ah, did not the very tone of her husband's voice tell her what would be her fate.

She did not immediately answer. The beating of her heart choked her, and though she essayed to speak, no sound came, and so they reached Ludgate-hill station; and in the hurry of getting into the right train, and inquiring after their luggage, Lord Graydon appeared to have forgotten that he had received no reply to his question, and Una breathed a sigh of intense satisfaction. But this state of security was only a false lure.

Just as they were about to enter the carriage set apart for them, and marked "reserved," a tall female figure, clad in a dark travelling cloak, rushed past them, and both recognised in it the Italian.

"She appears to be following us!" remarked George. "What was it she said this morning? You did not tell me!"

"Oh, she wished me every happiness, the insolent creature," replied Una, carelessly. "I think she must have some knowledge of my acquaintance with Gabriel Varne, and wishes to annoy!"

This seemed a very feasible explanation of the woman's conduct; and so, with an expressive shrug of his broad shoulders, he assisted his wife—oh, what a thrill of happiness it sent over him that thought, she was his wife—into the carriage, and entering himself, closed the door.

"I wish she had kept her place in her own world," he observed. "I do not like that such a woman should even glance at my wife, the Lady Graydon."

Una shuddered as she had shuddered on beholding the Italian standing beside her on the slush-covered pavement outside the fashionable church. Something whispered her that if not her mother, the woman held some kinship to herself, and a horrid dread took possession of her, lest this should, in any way, become known to her husband.

And the train dashed on its way, rocking to and fro with the rapidity with which it sped past the houses, fields, orchards, and frozen tree-bordered streams, Lord Graydon keeping up an incessant flow of bright, sparkling conversation, in which Una outwardly took great pleasure. Thus they reached Dover, where we will leave them.

CHAPTER XVII.

Six months had passed away, and the earth was once more clad in the pure, pale green garb of fairy-like Spring. Even London—big, restless, smoky London—looked bright and fair in that season; for from the many windows of the houses in the gloomy, dark squares, there peeped forth frail, sweet blossoms, and pale vines trailed themselves lovingly over the boxes which held their roots, and the sun poured his golden rays down upon the earth with lavish hand, and even London smiled, and seemed a desirable place of residence to many.

The London season had commenced early, owing to the early opening of Parliament, and among the upper ten thousand there was great excitement; that is, as much as is practicable with *bon ton*, for the new Lady Graydon was to give her first ball the second week of the season.

Lord Graydon had taken his place in the House of Lords, and already made a great stir about the new bill which was then agitating, more or less, every English heart, and on one occasion had made a most eloquent speech, young as he was, which elicited a sneer from one of his own party, that it was a pity Lord Graydon had not been born an

artisan's son. Thus he and his young wife were people of notoriety in their world, and were sought after, not alone for the beauty and fascinations of Una; they were influential in many ways in the House, and thus Una was courted by some who would perhaps have held themselves proudly aloof, though indeed she was the wife of one of England's noblest peers.

Their town house was in Park-lane, one of those detached houses with drooping-branched trees screening the windows from the rude gaze of passers-by, and at one of these stood Una; proud, beautiful, imperious, as of yore, with an added air of triumph in her bearing that did not sit ill upon her queenly style.

Beautiful exceedingly, indeed, she was, and no wonder that her young husband's handsome face flushed with pride and love as he gazed upon her. The trained morning robe of rich salmon pink fell in soft folds round her splendid figure, and the frillings of priceless, yet simple-looking lace revealed a small part of the marble, column-like throat. Was the renowned Helen as superbly lovely as this? the young fellow asked himself, and then he turned to her with a quick, bright, smile, drawing her to him, where he sat on a lounge near the window.

"Darling wife!" he said, passionately, kissing the full, red, smiling lips. "I think you are growing more lovely every day! It is too bad of you, for I am nearly crazed now," and with a happy laugh he pressed another kiss upon the lips that were held so temptingly near.

"*Vous êtes un gros, stupid!*" she laughed, putting her two hands on his shoulders, and looking into his blue eyes with a glance of tenderest love.

Heavens! was that look *false*? Could a woman act that? It would seem so, for when, some few minutes after, George quitted the apartment she sank down on to the lounge with a sigh that was half a cry, so long-drawn and quivering.

"Gabriel," she murmured, "where are you, my love? Oh, Gabriel! I long so for a sight of your face, and you will not come!"

The last words were indeed a wail of anguish, and the lovely face paled at the thoughts that came to her in her impotent anguish. Ah! those who saw the beautiful woman of fashion receiving her guests or greeting friends at theatre or opera, dreamed not of the moments of agony that came to her when it seemed better to give up all, position, husband, honour to seek the man she loved with all the passion with which such natures as hers love.

But these moods did not last—no, not long enough even to have carried out that wild wish to run away, and when they were over Una laughed at herself for a poor, weak, fool. Give up all this for which she had worked so hard! No! and the proud face flushed into brighter bloom, and the great, dark passionate eyes glowed with added lustre.

"It was well to let off the steam," she told herself, and would rise and ring for her maid to dress her for a ride. But on this day she did not go for a ride; she sat there instead, living over again in memory the days at Wood Lodge, the days that never could come back again, for everything was changed; and these thoughts only tended to fan the flame which should have been put out at once by a strong, firm hand; but where her inclinations were concerned Una was—well, not weak, but wayward and headstrong, and this once she gave herself up to her love for Gabriel, thinking of him in a way she had never done before.

That night was the night of the ball which had been the topic of conversation for a whole fortnight, an anomaly in the world of fashion, where nine days is an age for a thing to be remembered. Hyde-park Corner and Park-lane were lined with carriages, and a little crowd had collected to watch with eager, envious eyes their fair, bejewelled, and satin-draped sisters alight and trip up the broad

steps and enter the doors, which to them seemed like the portals of Paradise.

Una stood beside her husband receiving her guests, looking like some Eastern princess in her long sweeping robes of amber satin, with soft black lace falling over the shapely arms, and nestling round the marble bust, on which shone the Graydon diamonds.

There were diamonds, too, in the masses of dusky hair piled on the top of the haughty head, a fitting crown to the exquisite beauty of the calm, triumphant face.

Lord Graydon, with his handsome, boyish face and golden, curly hair, made a splendid foil for her; and truly they made a striking picture of youthful beauty as they stood there in the broad yet clear light, greeting, with quiet, well-bred pleasure, their friends—he so fair and courtly in bearing, she so haughtily gracious in the proud consciousness of her magnificent loveliness.

"Allow me to congratulate you, old fellow!"

This was some time later, when, the ball being an assured success, Una had—for a while, at least—given herself time to make more intimately the acquaintance of some of her new friends; and thus George was released, and immediately joined his especial cronies, one of whom it was who made the above remark.

His face flushed slightly with pleasure; but he returned with a light, bantering laugh.—

"On my brilliant parliamentary prospects?"

"Come, now, don't play the indifferent. I am alluding to your marriage," said the young fellow, whose name was Egbert Gordon.

"Thanks, old boy!" was the half-languid reply, which appeared to annoy young Gordon.

"If that tone is any criterion of your feelings, George, I am sorry she jilted Varne for you, though she does look more fitted for a countess than a commoner's wife," was the vexed answer.

Gabriel Varne had also been, and was still, a great "chum" of Egbert Gordon's, and had piled anathemas upon the head of the girl who could jilt him; but when he saw her, he, like the rest, succumbed to the witchery of her manner, and having so far condescended as to congratulate Lord Graydon he felt vexed at the other's nonchalant manner.

"So that absurd affair has leaked out!" remarked the young Earl, calmly; but the flesh of his blue eyes, and the red flush that rose to the roots of his curly hair, told that he was moved.

"Absurd! I don't know if it is an absurd story; but all our world is fully aware of the fact that she was engaged first to Varne, and jilted him in the most heartless manner. Excuse me, I am engaged to Miss Blake for this dance!" and away he went, leaving Lord Graydon standing alone by the open window, a cloud on his brow, and a disagreeable heaviness at his heart.

Somehow, the fact of the world—his world—knowing of it seemed to bring it more flagrantly to his mind, and at this early stage of their married life a feeling of jealousy of this first engagement stole into his heart.

Had she loved Gabriel? Did she love him (Lord Graydon) so well?

These were not pleasant thoughts for a young husband to indulge in on the night when he should be rejoicing in the triumphs of his wife; but Egbert Gordon's words had called up the memory of some other words he had heard spoken by Una's lips.

If they were true, then why had she married him?

It was bitter, indeed; but a horrible suspicion entered his head. Had his title dazzled her?

No! He was an idiot to indulge in such ornal thoughts—cruel to himself and to her; and was that loving glance, that smile false, a lie?

"What a jealous fool I am!" he muttered, as his wife came towards him leaning on the arm of one of England's greatest statesmen,

who was evidently charmed with his lovely hostess.

"George, his lordship says," commenced Una, in that low, rich voice that was in itself a charm to steal away a man's senses; and then the three entered into a long political discussion, in which Una managed to hold her own, smiling gentle acquiescence where they went too deep, and making the most, as she knew how, of what she did know; and so, when Una was compelled to leave them to attend to her duties as hostess, the great politician turned with a smile to Lord Graydon, saying,—

"You are indeed to be congratulated upon your choice of a wife; she will make a Lady Graydon worthy of the old name. Sir Arthur Raye's niece, is she not? A good old county family the Rayes; some rascally fellows among them. You have heard of Lionel Raye, of course? But a splendid family in the main."

Lord Graydon felt a pardonable thrill of pride sweep through him at the old lord's words of praise. Of course he knew the Rayes were people of distinction, otherwise he would never have set his mind on Una, but it was pleasant to hear his wife's family spoken of in this manner; and it was only right that his wife's pedigree should be *uns reproach*.

At this point of their conversation, Lord —— was called away by some of his colleagues, and Lord Graydon was again alone and with pleasanter thoughts, which, however, were to be rudely dispelled.

Near where he stood was a large alcove, with a most inviting lounge in it, and it had the double charm that those in the large ballroom could not see the occupants of it, while they had a full view of all that passed; but Lord Graydon was hidden from sight behind the long curtains that draped the curtains, and so it was that words never meant for his ears were spoken by lips that he had deemed so true to himself, if false to Gabriel.

It was a woman's voice that broke the thread of his musings, a rich low voice, whose every tone had power to move his heart—the voice of his wife; but ah! what was it she was saying? He could not see her face, but her accent told him only too well the expression that dwelt upon it.

"Love him! yes, with a love I can never feel for another man. *Basta*, it seems strange to you, but my heart is hot, and knows what love means. Can I help that he was not my husband?"

Hard words, indeed, for a husband of a few months to stand and listen to—cruel words for a woman to utter, even if true. A cold stern look came over the fair, handsome boyish face, a look that made him appear ten years older, though there were no lines under the passion-dark blue eyes, no lines round the patrician mouth.

Was this the woman who was to be the mother of the future Lord of Graydon—this the woman whom he had called pure and innocent. Great Heaven! how could it be! The curtain was raised at this moment, and a figure stepped out of the window into the flooding moonlight, and Lord Graydon saw, not his wife, but the Italian!

She turned at the exclamation that involuntarily escaped him, and seeing by his face that he had been there some time, laughed low and softly, pausing with one hand raised, while with the other she held the black lace mantilla that was draped round her head, after the manner of the Spanish women.

"*Dio buono!* So you Englese know how to play eavesdropper," she muttered savagely. "Well, milord, I hope it has been of service to you!" and then she flitted away, leaving him staring stupidly after her, powerless to speak or move.

The likeness to Una struck him with a kind of horror, and then her voice! What was the mystery? Heaven! this vile shameless creature could have no connection with his pure wife! It was a freak of nature; but it cast a

dark shadow over his spirit, a pallor over his fair, frank face.

While he was wondering and puzzling over these things, the person with whom she had been talking emerged from his shelter, and George beheld, to his astonishment, Sir Arthur Ray. There was a coldly, revengeful look upon the old Baronet's face, a repellent expression that told of long brooding, and giving way to his sorrow; and though Lord Graydon longed to question him as to his friendship with a woman of such notorious character, and her presence here in his house, he forbore, feeling that he would not receive a satisfactory answer, for of late Sir Arthur had been most strange in his manner, so that a few said the death of his only child had turned his brain. Be that as it may, he was ever brooding, with a hard cold look on his stern features, and a hot burning light in his eyes.

Some time after this he stood near his lovely wife, and watched with a somewhat jealous gaze the swift smiles that chased each other across that mobile southern face, the quick uplifting of the large white lids, with their heavy fringes of darkest hue, the soft flashes that came from the dark eyes. Those musings had roused the demon, which, in the breast of a man with a lovely wife, whom he suspects of being a coquette, only half slumbers; and so it was with a prejudiced eye that he took in all those softly gay glances, those bright trifles of happy, triumphant laughter.

"Yet was she to blame?" he asked himself chidingly. Young, wealthy, and possessed of such marvellous beauty that even women gazed upon her in surprised-wondering admiration, was it strange or unnatural that fearing her power she should me it? And just then her eyes fell upon him. Whether it was chance, or that some instinct warned her, it is impossible to say; but a bright welcoming light flashed into the wondrous orbs, and a slight motion of the queenly dark head, with its flashing diadem, bade him come to her.

That glance of invitation set his mind at rest. Her love was his; she only encouraged these moths for amusement, and then if a man did not want his wife to be admired he should neither choose a lovely one, nor bring her into society.

Thus the young fellow argued with himself, trying to exorcise the demon that had entered his breast. A man of note and fashion, if he take a fair and gifted woman to wife and love her, must ever feel more or less of these pangs, and so he tried to school himself to bear it quietly.

It was growing late now, and already some of the guests had departed; but Lady Graydon's first ball had been such a success that some were loth to say good-bye to the great lighted rooms, with their silken hangings, round which the perfume of a thousand rare flowers clung in intoxicating, delicious bouquet.

Yet all things must end, even the first ball of a new belle whose charms are setting half the young fellows wild, though she be married; and so at last, just as the first pale streak of golden light, heralding the approach of the god of day, struck through the blinds of the big, old-fashioned shutters, the last guests departed, and Lord and Lady Graydon stood alone in the midst of the spoiled beauty of flowers, and satin, and wreathed divs.

"Was it a success, *mia?*" asked Una, laying one slender, lemon-gloved hand caressingly on his broad shoulder.

It was not all sham. She liked him for what he had given her; he it was who had enabled her to stand triumphant amidst that crowd of aristocrats this night, sought after by all, the acknowledged "pearl queen of beauty," and for this a rush of gratitude welled up from her impulsive soul into the splendour of her eyes.

So like love did it look, that soft, tender, yet eager glance, so like love the tender touch of the slender hand, that a mighty rush of remorse swept over Lord Graydon's heart, and catching her to him with swift passion he aid his lips upon hers in long, long kiss.

"Darling!" he cried, "you do love me, say it—though you are my wife tell me again that you love me!"

And Una, suppressing the feeling of impatience that came upon her at his words, which had banished that feeling of tender gratitude, looked up into his handsome face, aglow with the might of his love, whispered softly and shyly,

"George, I love you—dearly!"

The last word was very lowly spoken; but it satisfied the heart of the young husband, who lifted the dark, beautiful face to his own as he murmured in reply,—

"You are a darling, and I am a jealous fool!"

"I will not contradict, monsieur," she laughed, saucily, freeing herself from his embrace; "but, sir, you have not answered my question. Was my first ball a success?"

"A perfect success to your guests; and, by-the-bye, we had one self-invited," he retorted.

"Who was that?" she asked, trying in vain to remember the faces of all those whom she had greeted during the first tiring hour at the opening of the ball.

"Guess!" he said, tantalisingly.

Now that he had kissed away all his jealous fears and doubts he felt in the humour for a little fun, and it amused him to see the look of wonder on that lovely face that was his, all his own to kiss, to fondle, and caress.

"Indeed I cannot; for, in truth, only the faces of a few have remained on my memory, and to my knowledge none but those who received invitations were here!" she returned, quietly.

"Seeing that she only sat in the window-seat yonder is it no wonder she escaped your majesty's notice?" he observed.

"George, do not be so stupid! Tell me at once who was this mysterious visitor!" exclaimed Una, pouting slightly, all her curiosity aroused at the mention of a woman. Who was it—who could it be?

"No less a person than our Italian, and in close confab with the stern Sir Arthur! Looks funny, eh?" was the startling (to Una) reply.

"The Italian!" she cried, recoiling as though he had said a cobra.

"You need not look so frightened," said George, looking in surprise at the face ever which a grey pallor had stolen. "Why, she will not attempt to kill you though she is an Italian; those heroines won't do for these days."

"But what was she doing in our house, and talking to Sir Arthur? There must be some secret between them," she cried, half hysterically, wringing her small hands as if in terror.

"And if there be, is it any concern of yours?" demanded Lord Graydon, a shade of displeasure in his tones, which roused Una to a sense of how near she was betraying herself; and then that visit might have been only with the intent to extort money.

"None! only—only I have a horrible dread of that woman. She seems to act the part in London that Farmer Gray did down at Wood Lodge; always appears to annoy me when I am happiest," was her more collected reply.

"She certainly does appear at inopportune moments," was his half-laughing answer; and then it being late or early they left the ball-room, and sought rest for mind and brain in slumber.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Row was alive with dainty equipages, upon whose occupants the sun shone in long golden shafts, glinting on the calm patrician faces of the daughters and wives of the exclusive few; on the smiling satisfied faces of the daughters and wives of rich soap-boilers, cotton merchants, &c., who, by dint of their banking account, were tolerated by those clear-voiced, calm-eyed women, or admired and

pitied as the case deserved, by the sterner sex; or equestrians, male and female, mounted on superb horses, whose points they evidently desired to show, seeing how they put them through their paces.

"A splendid creature that!" remarked a young fellow, leaning idly over the iron railings whither he had stolen, much to the disgust of his mother and sister, who were driving, to have a quiet cigar.

"Which, who?" asked his companion, who was none other than Egbert Gordon. "Oh! La Italiana."

"No, I mean that superb creature mounted on the Awab; wades perfectly, can see daylight between her and the saddle when she canters."

"That is Lady Graydon," returned Egbert, gravely. The tone of his companion was rather light, and he felt it would do him good to be reproved.

"Oh! I really did not mean any dispraise of her ladyship, as your tones imply," was the injured reply, and just then Una turned her horse's head to speak to some one standing by the railings.

She had not noticed the Italian, nor dreamed that she, too, had pulled up a short distance from her; but as they sat there on their horses clad in the same style of habit, with large cavalier hats and drooping feathers, the strange resemblance between this creature of the *demi-monde*, with her wickedly lovely face, and the proud Lady Graydon, struck many with a sense of wonder.

"By Jove! she might be her daughter!"

"What a remarkable thing!"

"Mamma, by-the-bye, who was Lady Graydon."

Such were the remarks which the resemblance called forth; but they bowed and smiled sweetly, when the lovely eyes looked recognisably into their own, all unconscious of the conjectures that were being bandied from lip to lip.

Lord Graydon was not with her, having some parliamentary business to transact, and so had handed her over to the tender mercies of young Lord Oakly, with the laughing observation that he had better take care of her; so Una was feeling proud and happy; the wife of one of England's richest nobles, the son of one of the grand old Norman families to play cavalier.

Beautiful enough, indeed, to warrant all the words of praise and admiration passed on her, looked the youthful Countess, as she rode up and down the Row, smiling that rare slow smile of hers, a rich crimson glow staining the clear olive of her oval cheeks—the great dark eyes black from excitement, though her manner was calm, even to hauteur.

And riding thus, laughing carelessly at some remark of Lord Oakly's, she came face to face with the Italian. They simultaneously drew rein, their horses rearing on their hind legs in angry protest against the sharp tug at their bridles; while the two women, so strangely alike in their dark-glowing southern beauty, stared straight into each other's eyes; the one haughtily, calmly, yet with a wild horror, the other significantly, and with a soft, irritating, assured smile.

Then they turned their horses' aside, and passed on, but in the minds of all there, that little scene had made a deep impression which, in the after days, came back to them, strengthening their belief in the strange story of Lady Graydon's birth.

She made no comment upon the episode as she and the young lord went on their way now in the direction of Park-lane. There was no change in the beautiful face, no paling of the rich carmine of those olive-tinted cheeks, no forcedness in the sweet smile, and yet in her heart sat a great quailing fear.

Did that glance look like the glance of a pretender? Assuredly no. Then her words were true.

Horrible, damning thought! It could not—it could not be true; her pride, her ambition kept reiterating.

There must be some reason, if not the actual one which she gave, whispered common sense; but pride upheld her, and those who watched the two leave the Row were half inclined then to think they must have been mistaken—the likeness between the two women must have rendered them over imaginative.

"Do you know, I think it's a deu—great shame that such creatures as that woman who drew up so impertinently in front of you should not be ordered out of the Row?" remarked Lord Oakly, vexedly, as they cantered up Park-lane.

Una turned to him with a smile, surprised and inquiring; then as though it had recurred to her,—

"Oh, that beautiful, Italian-faced woman! She did me no harm, and," with a laugh light and careless, "I heard someone say she and I were alike. Perhaps she wished to see me nearer, or was herself struck with the resemblance."

All this was said coolly and calmly as though she were speaking of something utterly without interest to herself, merely carrying on a conversation which he had broached for conversation's sake.

Lord Oakly had been so taken up with his sense of injury at such women mixing with the women of his set that he had paid no attention to the murmurs of those around.

Now he looked curiously at the glowing face turned half-coquettishly for his inspection, and a shock of displeasure stirred him. Yes, she was, indeed, like this notoriously wicked woman—the very drop of the white, heavily-fringed lids, the wooing, bewildering smile, all were here. What did it mean?

"The resemblance is marvellous, and I should imagine not very pleasing to you," he remarked.

"It is far, very far from pleasing," she replied, with deep emphasis, and having arrived at the gate of her own house, the subject was forgotten in insisting that her companion should dine with them.

During dinner Lord Graydon, who had only just arrived in time to dress, and had, therefore, not had time to inquire before, asked whom they had seen in the Park, and if they had spent a pleasant time there; and then, of course, the *rencontre* with the Italian was told by Lord Oakly.

A displeased flush rose to his face during the recital, and an irritated feeling of annoyance came over him that *his* wife should be spoken of in connection with this woman.

He felt half startled, too, and his thoughts wandered unconsciously back to the night of the harvest home at Farmer Gray's, when he and Una had discovered the little parlour with the photograph of his wife, and he remembered that then a strange feeling of wonder stirred him, a feeling that was now intensified into a dull, unexpressed horror of he knew not what.

Una rising from the table roused him from his painful reverie, and looking with a laugh at his guest, he said,—

"Shall we go with her ladyship? We have not lived long enough yet to prefer wine and walnuts to the society of cultured women."

Unconsciously he laid a stress on the word "cultured," which showed his mind was still ill at ease.

And so they followed her to the large drawing-room, where tall, rose-coloured candles burned steadily in their gilded candleabras, reflecting themselves in the long mirrors till there seemed to be uncountable numbers.

Yet there was no unpleasant glare in Lady Graydon's drawing-room; the deep rich blue of the curtains and thin-legged chairs, and puffy, inviting lounges, and seats of all descriptions, accorded harmoniously with the softening dull-hued drab carpet.

It was a room to describe which would take whole pages, with its priceless statuettes that nestled cunningly among leafy foliage, its tables strewn with rare bric-à-brac, old chin vases and cups that would send a connoisseur mad with envy; one or two rare paintings

hung just in the right lights; a room wherein every object was of interest, and nothing paled on either sight or mind.

The young Viscount would fain have lingered there by the side of his lovely hostess, listening to the pure tones of her rich voice trilling forth some passionate Italian love-song, for Una had cultivated this art of late; but he was due at Lady Somebody else's, and so, at about ten, he rose and made his adieux.

Una remained at the piano some time after his departure, and Lord Graydon sat on a lounge near, his face telling only too plainly that his thoughts were troubled.

At length, just as she had finished a sparkling fantasia, with more variations than music it, he called out to her, saying he had something to say to her.

He looked at her as she came, with that gliding, stately step, across the great room that seemed to have "patrician hush" upon it, herself as queenly and royally beautiful as an empress; and, looking, told himself that he must be going mad to have harboured the thoughts for a moment that had come to him while he sat there, apparently listening to her playing; and yet, his first question was another link in the chain of those thoughts.

"What was your father's name, Una?"

A look of intensest surprise passed over Una's face, and then she laughed softly, laying one slender hand among the golden tangle of his curly hair.

"You bad boy, to interrupt my playing to ask such a trivial question! You must be 'hard up,' as the boys term it, for a topic of conversation."

"Nay, Una, sweet, it is of more importance than you imagine. I am harassed by a great many speculations, and without knowing your father's Christian name cannot arrive at any correct conclusions."

"One would think you were about to unravel some thrilling mystery, to judge by your look and tone!" cried his wife, in playful accents.

"And so I am!" was the rather startling reply—startling in the extreme to Una, for her thoughts flew at once to that interview with the Italian, and the words she had spoken thereto.

Had George discovered something?

"What is the mystery?" she asked, trying to hide her anxiety beneath a laughing exterior, and succeeding, for Una had wonderful self-command.

"I will tell you when you have answered my question," he returned.

"My father's name was Lionel," she said.

At the simple words a ghastly change came over the young fellow's face, and the boyish blue eyes gazed at her in utter and complete horror, while the hand that had been placed on her shoulder in a loving caress fell from her as though there were something uncanny in the touch.

"What is there in the mention of my father's name to cause you such concern?" continued his wife, seeing that he was incapable of speech.

Her tone was a trifle irritated, and this effectively roused him.

"Una," he said, hoarsely, "do you know that it was Lionel Rye who caused Farmer Gray's wife to disgrace herself?"

"No!"

There was a bitter agony in the rich, low voice now, a bitter agony in the lovely face, from which the colour had all faded, and the glorious dark eyes looked dumbly into his, asking the question the pale, quivering lips could not.

Then, with a mighty effort, she put the horror from her, and, facing him, said,—

"Does that make any difference to us? We are married, and you say you love me. Can this thing alter that?"

She asked it proudly as her right, standing before him in the ripe bloom of her beauty, like a young empress commanding her subject, yet with a soft, lingering smile on her lips that rendered her irresistible.

Could he lose her just as he had gained her,

this beautiful, loved wife of his, whom at one time he had never hoped to gain?

Was it her fault if her father—he shuddered at the thought of the man—had been a villain?

It was cruel of Sir Arthur not to have told him; at least, he could then have made his choice; while now he looked upon her in her loveliness, proud, yet supplicating, his wife! his own! fondly cherished for more than six months.

No, he could not put her from him, even if this thing were true, and the world need never know it.

He would seek out Sir Arthur, and ask him to quiet that vile Italian, and then he would bury the horrible truth in oblivion.

Easier said than accomplished, Lord Graydon, but youth is fond of dreams.

"Una," he whispered, holding out his arms, "come to me if you can honestly say you had no inkling of this. Nay! dearest, do not shrink from me in anger; but I would never forgive that, though the parting broke my heart."

"Parting!" she murmured, as kneeling on the soft carpet she laid her head on his breast.

A horrible fear was tugging at her heart. Would that woman tell him of her visit on her marriage morn? Would she tell him that she (Una) had been warned? Visions of all her anticipated triumphs and pleasures floated before her in mad mockery. Memories of the ball of so recent date, where she had "stood the fairest of them all," though there were women of surpassing beauty in that assembly, were vividly before her. Should she lose all these?

Oh, Heaven! and if, finding that she had received a warning of the mystery hanging over her birth; if, finding this, he should cast her from him—from all these luxuries of mind and body, carriages, horses, jewels, servants, for which she had bartered her soul—then Gabriel would have been sacrificed for an empty shell.

This love, that she nursed and cherished fully in her heart for Gabriel Varne would still be a sin, and she would find her ambition, and love all of no value—all turned to dead sea-fruit in true earnest.

"Dearest!" said Lord Graydon, holding her to him in loving passionateness, "Dearest, I only spoke of a possibility, which you well might grow angry at my even thinking of. How should you know of any strangeness connected with your birth, since Sir Arthur always treated you as his niece?"

"And how, if I am Colonel Lionel Rye's daughter, am I not his niece?" asked Una, in amaze. She had not thought out the disgraceful truth as yet, but his words sent a dawning light into her brain. If the woman was Farmer Gray's wife, then she could not be Lionel Rye's widow; then, if she was Una's mother—

Una shuddered, and drew nearer the stalwart form of her young husband in the shame and humiliation this thought brought her. How she had always laughed and jeered at the "vulgar" farmer; she, whose very presence in the world was a shame and crime—she, whom Farmer Gray must have pitied with a cold, harsh pity for her stupid arrogance.

"I will see Sir Arthur to-morrow, and then you will know all the truth. Until then, dear one, do not let this trouble you," said Lord Graydon gently, and Una laid her head—her dark proud head—upon his shoulder, and wept in the excess of her anguish.

Could she but see this woman, and bribe her not to reveal that visit of hers, all might yet be well. A horrible loathing for this woman, whom, if her husband's idea was true, she ought to give the sacred name of mother to, came over her. Oh! that she were dead, anywhere, so that she could not despoil her Una of her luxurious home and triumphs.

Her husband's eyes were resting on the lovely, haggard, troubled face—half wondering, half musingly; but she, knowing her own thoughts, flushed guiltily, and averted her eyes, quickly saying,—

"George, you do not seem to comprehend all it is to me; think how my courage is tried!"

"Aye, dearest! I have thought it all out, the horror to you, the disgrace I have put upon the old untainted name of Graydon—disgrace that you are the innocent cause of—yet none the less disgrace. Can I keep it a secret? Will it not some day leak out, and bring scorn and contumely, if not on my head, on those of my children, should I be granted any?"

"You regret your marriage with me?" asked Una, mournfully fixing her large dark eyes upon his face with tender, searching scrutiny.

Una would have made a splendid actress; the attitude, expression, and tone were perfect; and gazing upon her in this new sweet, pleading humility, a tide of passion swept over him.

"No, no! a thousand times no!" he cried. "You are still mine—all mine—be your birth what it may."

And so they talked on in the quiet of the luxurious apartment, that was only disturbed now and again by the quick rattle of some cab hurrying to the theatre, or the lighter, softer roll of carriage-wheels; and Una's thoughts flew with passionate yearning to her love—Gabriel Varne—and lying in her husband's loving arms, she wished with vain impotence, that if her husband, finding her out in her deceit, should cast her from him that Gabriel—no, better not record her thoughts; they were wicked, sinful thoughts, that in the fulfilling have led many a weak woman to perdition.

(To be continued.)

A SORBET SELLER.—Street life in Cairo is very attractive to the stranger. Even business seeks the open air rather than the close and stuffy shop. Guides, ass drivers, messengers, are ever on the lookout for strangers. Other industries are more cosmopolitan; the sellers of fruit, of sugar-cane, of water, of sorbet, abound. Sorbet, once the beverage of the rich exclusively, is now offered for a trifle to the moving world on the thoroughfare. Sorbet has been brought within the reach of all; but it is rather an orange, lemon, or pomegranate syrup, than the cool sorbet of other days. The dealer stalks the street, calm, placid, like all Orientals. His garb is wretched, his turban of a colour nor to be decided, his slippers cling to his feet by some fascination. A porous earthen jar and a goblet not over clean, constitute the fellah's outfit. At a sign he comes up, and with proverbial gravity pours out a glass, waits in all patience for the purchaser to empty it, receives the accustomed coin, and goes on to meet another customer. He may pass ten fountains, but the goblet is never rinsed.

A HOMELY INDUSTRY.—A correspondent writes from Paris that potato culture is likely to receive a new impetus since the plan of selling them peeled, sliced and dried, like certain fruits, seems to be the taste of the export market. The drying of the potatoes can follow the period of the dessication of fruits. The method obviates decay and germination of the tuber, and occupying a less volume, transport will be cheaper and less difficult. The potatoes are peeled by machinery; next carefully washed, sliced in rounds, and left for twenty minutes in a strong solution of kitchen salt. The brine induces firmness in the slices and prevents their changing colour—thus securing what sulphur does for fruits. Later the cuttings left to drain, placed in the drying apparatus on hurdle shelves, and submitted to a temperature varying from one hundred and seventy-six to one hundred and ninety-four degrees Fahrenheit. They must remain a little longer in this hot bath than fruit. Before using, the slices have to be steeped twelve to fifteen hours in water, when they will become as fresh and as flavoury as new potatoes.

DIANA'S DIAMONDS.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

I did not see much of Lady Lorraine for a week or two after this, save at a distance. I saw her, for instance, at the Cowes Regatta, the centre of a crowd of worshippers, dressed in the most perfect of sea-going gowns, and looking not more than five-and-twenty. I saw her at Goodwood Races, one of the most remarkable figures on the lawn—clad in a white silk, draped with black lace, bonnet and parasol to match, and with crimson flowers in her bonnet, on her parasol and in her bouquet. She was, as usual, the cynosure of all eyes, and followed by a little band of men. One carried her field-glasses, which were daintily mounted in gold and ivory. Another had charge of her wrap, a third of her fan. It was a kind of royal progress, and she passed Hugh, Mrs. Rose and me quite close, with but a faint smile, and a mere lowering of the eyelids. I felt rather hurt and resentful for the first time in my life, and Hugh was bitterly pleased, and whispered to me—

"You see she has not waited for you to take the first steps, Ranee, and perhaps it is as well. Now you will have every excuse for saying, 'Not at home!'"

But in the depths of my heart I knew perfectly well that a few smiles and a few sweet words from her ladyship, and I should be as much her slave as ever.

We only went to Goodwood the first day, Ada, Rose, and I, but Hugh attended the races each day. He told me that Lady Lorraine was well to the fore in splendid gowns, and that people swarmed round her like flies round a pot of honey. He also told me that the ring had scored tremendously, and that some of the backers had been badly hit—notoriously Carden, who had gone a mucker on a horse called "Blue Ruin," and was just about stone broke, from which curious phraseology I gathered that Captain Carden had lost a great deal of money over the recent meeting.

Next day I met Lady Lorraine, in fact—in Palmerston-road. She was walking with Captain Carden, and looked unusually pale, and was talking (for her) in a rapid and excited manner. She scarcely noticed me. Judge, then, of my utter amazement when I had a visit from her that self-same evening, at the extraordinary hour of half-past nine o'clock. Hugh was dining at our mess, as it was a big guest night, and he was bound to be there, and I had partaken of a slender meal alone, and was trying over some new accompaniment on the guitar, when the drawing-room door opened; and, quite unannounced, Lady Lorraine walked in!

So amazed was I that I dropped the guitar and sat and stared at her. She was dressed in her dinner-dress of crimson satin and black lace, and had a diamond butterfly sparkling at her throat, and another in her hair. All this was revealed when she removed a very long fur-lined cloak which entirely enveloped her, having a hood drawn over her head.

Without a word she coolly took off this wrap, laid it on a chair; then, as if she was an invited and expected guest, she walked over to the fireplace and threw herself down into a low chair, opposite to me.

"How to you do, Lady Lorraine?" I said, rather stiffly.

"Very ill, indeed, my sweet Angelina!" was her calm reply. And as I looked at her face, as she lay comfortably back against the dark velvet cushions of her lounge, I noted mentally that she had aged ten years since I had last seen her. Her lips had lost their firmness, deep lines seemed to have suddenly appeared in her face, her eyes looked sunken and anxious.

What had happened?

"You are naturally surprised at this strange visit from me, but I knew you were alone this

evening. Sir Roper is dining at your mess, and I wanted an hour's uninterrupted talk with you—undisturbed and perfectly private. I have something to say to you—something to tell you—of the last importance!"

"To tell me, Lady Lorraine!" I echoed, in amazement.

"Yes, to tell you, Diana Halford; and what I have to tell you is for your ear alone. Before we go any further, will you fetch me a testament?"

I thought this an extraordinary request. Was she going to read and expound to me? Nevertheless, to hear was to obey, and I left the room and presently returned with what she required.

She took it in her hand, and examined it; then sat up erect, and tendered it back to me, saying—

"I want you to swear on this, that what I am about to tell you will never reveal to human being—without my permission!"

"I will promise to keep secret whatever you may wish to confide in me," I answered; "but I would rather not take an oath."

"But you *must*," she replied, tapping her foot impishly, "otherwise I cannot tell you my secret."

"Then I am afraid I must decline your confidence," I returned, with unmoved composure.

"That is out of your power—you *must* share it!"

"I see no *must* in the matter."

"No, of course you do not, as you are in complete ignorance of what I am about to tell you. Once you are as wise as you *will* be, very shortly, you will see a very large *must* in the matter."

"At least permit me to tell Hugh?—I ask no more."

"No; I cannot permit you to tell any one."

"Does it concern you alone?"

"You and me," she answered, briefly. "Come," she added, impatiently, "we are losing very valuable time. I may never have such another golden opportunity as this. Make up your mind to give me your promise, Diana, and take the oath."

"No, I cannot, *cannot* promise to keep what seems a serious matter from Hugh. Between husbands and wives there should be no secrets. I am sure you know that yourself."

"Quite an exploded idea! Come, I will conjure with what will surely move you. I implore you, as you value my friendship, to do as I request. To be silent will harm no one, and will save me from misery untold. It is not much I ask of you, Diana, only silence; and all this time my fate, my honour, my happiness—nay, everything in life I value—is trembling in the balance, and it is for you to give me a pledge, and save me!"

Her voice was low and soft; it thrilled me.

"Oh! Lady Lorraine!—I save you! How can I—a stranger to you and yours a few months ago—have such extraordinary influence over your life and happiness? You talk in riddles."

"Riddles, indeed! Oh, Diana! how hard you are. I come to you for help, and come in vain" (tears stood in her eyes as she spoke). "You will be sorry—oh! more than sorry—that you have failed me in my need, when you know all. More, I am ready to swear on this book that you will never forgive yourself if you do not help me now."

Her tears and her appeal had the desired effect. I was generous and impulsive. I could not endure to see my idol in distress and tears, nor listen to her upbraiding.

And few young girls, let me here remark, could have withstood the prayers and tears of this beautiful arch-enchantress.

"Here—give me the book, then," I said, abruptly, "and I will promise. I swear most solemnly on this Holy Testament never to reveal the secret to a soul, that you are about to impart without your permission."

"And that you will never have," she added, in a low voice. Then wiping her eyes, she rose and stood beside me, and said, "Pro

pare yourself for something that will seem incredible, but which is perfectly true."

"I am prepared to hear what you have to say, but do tell it soon; my heart is beating so fast, and I cannot endure suspense."

"Turn round and look in the glass—look at yourself. Now look at me—are you any the wiser?"

"Not the least."

"You have no imagination. Can you not imagine what I looked like at your age?"

"Yes," I replied. "I suppose your hair was fairer, and your figure slighter."

"Dense!—dense!—as a London fog! Then I see I must tell you, Diana," she said, taking my hands in both of hers, holding them so tightly that she hurt me, looking me full in the face, "I am—your mother!"

When she had uttered these four words I gave a shriek, tore my hands from hers, and retreated several paces, placing a chair between us. Then I gasped out,

"Lady Lorraine, you must be mad!"

"Never more sane in my life! But I don't wonder that you are startled, and that you think me crazy. I feel very old indeed when I realise the fact that I have a grown-up, married daughter!"

She was perfectly collected as she spoke, and stood on the heart-ring in her sweeping laces and satins and flashing diamonds, one perfect arm resting on the mantel-piece, completely mistress of the position; whilst I, trembling all over like an aspen-leaf, and convinced that I had to do with a mad woman, cowered behind a substantial chair, and kept a greedy eye on the bell!

CHAPTER XXXII.

"You need not be so desperately frightened," said my unwelcome guest. "I am not insane; I am not going to murder you. I am really your mother, though I can easily believe that just at present it is rather hard for your mind to grasp the fact."

"My mother died when I was a year old," I answered. "She lies in her grave these twenty years. How dare you assume her name? Now I begin to believe in what people said of you, Lady Lorraine, though I had closed my ears to the best of my power. Now I believe that you are what they say—a heartless, unscrupulous, dangerous woman!"

"Oh! they say *that*, do they? Well, in future you will know that they are speaking of your mother; and if I am heartless, unscrupulous, and dangerous, take care that these little traits are not hereditary. You have inherited my face, although you do not see the resemblance; why should you not inherit my nature?"

"My mother is *dead*—my mother is *dead*!" I reiterated. "She died twenty years ago," I repeated, in a voice I scarcely recognised as my own.

"Yes, she did! She died to *you* and her husband—not really, but figuratively. She has come to life again as Lady Lorraine."

"I will not believe it! No, never!" I cried, covering my eyes with my hand, and thus shutting out that brilliant figure standing before the fireplace.

I could not bear to think that all my tender memories, nurtured secretly, and none the less strong nurtured for years as a secret possession, were all at once to be thus swept away by a few crazy words from Lady Lorraine, who was surely not responsible for her actions this evening.

"I see you don't believe me, my little Ranees, that I nursed in my arms, and knitted little socks for, and was proud of in every way. Yes, you had soft hair like golden spun silk, and were only ten months old when I saw you last. Come here, to the glass, and I will convince you this time. Come!"

Mechanically I moved towards her. It was, as I had often heard, by far the wisest and most prudent plan to humour mad people. I would try and humour her.

"Look," she said, "at your eyes and brows!"

I glanced up, and in my own brown orbs fear was most legibly written.

"Now look at mine. You see the colour and shape is the same, do you not?"

True; but her eyes glistered with a hard brilliancy that frightened me.

"Then," she continued, "note our features—nose, forehead, chin; they are exactly the same. I am twenty years your senior. You wear your hair differently to mine—it is much lighter; but anyone could tell at a glance that we were mother and daughter. Now give me your hand; it is precisely the same as mine in shape and size, even to the very nails. As to your foot, I know it is small, as small as this," exhibiting a dainty little satin shoe and open-worked stocking.

I remembered with a pang of agony that seemed actually to contract my heart, one day—a day I could never forget—when, in spite of Peggy, I had tried on a pair of pretty fairy slippers, and how they had fitted.

"Still unbelieving, my daughter, in spite of the test of our two faces? Now you shall try the test of questions. Ask me what you will!"

"What was my birthday?"

"The fourth of May, eighteen hundred and sixty two."

"What was my father's name—his second name?"

"Second name!" placing her hand to her head. "John—John—it was an odd name. It began with a G. Stay, I have it—Glass-pole! It was his godfather's name, and it brought him in a nice little legacy. It came when we were at Lahore, and I remember he got me a lovely landau all the way up from Calcutta. Is there anything else you would like to know?"

"Yes. There was a certain box kept in the store-room of our bungalow. My father would not allow it to be touched, because it contained things that had been my mother's. Tell me what its contents were, and then I will believe you."

"The contents of that dear old box! Nothing easier. I missed it frightfully, and many a day I languished for things that were therein. In the first place, a pink satin dress trimmed with Brussels lace; next a white satin. There was also a fancy costume in which I went as 'Folly' to the governor's ball. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! There was also a habit—dark green—the opera cloak—one red and gold—some fans, slippers, and odds-and-ends. The box was black, and had D.O.M. in brass nails on the lid—Diana Olivia Manners! I have long dropped the Diana, and as you may have noticed, sign myself Olive Lorraine. Now I see by your face that you are convinced."

I was beginning to believe in Lady Lorraine, now I had no desire. Big beads of perspiration stood upon my forehead. My knees trembled under me. My hands were damp and clammy.

"Is there anything else you would like to ask, my dear?"

"Yes—yes," I faltered. "If you are my mother, as you say, why did you abandon me? Why did you leave my father? Why did he always allow me to think that you were *dead*?"

"Ah, why, indeed? That is a long story. I shall tell you the whole of it another time. I think you have heard quite enough for one night. Come and kiss me, my daughter!"

I approached her timidly, and she took me in her arms and kissed me.

Little, little did I ever dream that I would receive a mother's embrace!

"Now that you know who I am, you must be to me a *very* daughter. I shall come and go as I please, and my dear Diana's husband may be as cool as he likes; but he shall not shut the door upon his wife's mother, shall he?"

"Oh, mother, mother! Let me tell him, I

implore you! I beseech of you! I cannot bear to keep this secret from him!"

"Remember your promise! You shall tell him when I give you leave—no sooner! Do not forget that you owe duty and obedience to me as well as to him! Who in the whole world is so near to you as I am?"

I was dumb. It never occurred to me to say that for twenty years she had forsaken me, and that it was not to her I owed a title of obedience, love, or duty, till I learnt why she had been dead to me for so many years!

"When did you recognise me?" I faltered out at last.

"The night you wore the Begum's necklace—I knew it too well. It was mine once upon a time, and now it has been the means of restoring me my daughter. Your diamonds, Diana, have given you a mother. Well, I see you are agitated and over wrought—and no wonder! You have not my mental endurance or iron physique! You had better ring for your maid, and go to bed! I shall come and see you again shortly!"

As she was saying this she was once more wrapping herself up in her cloak, then she pulled the hood far over her head, kissed her hand, and opening the door went out and left me.

When I heard the hall-door close I got up, struggled over to the sofa, and flung myself down there, and lay as one who is dead; then tears came to my relief, and I wept.

Oh! how I wept, and why should I? I asked myself, angrily. Should I, so friendless, save for Hugh, not be thankful to find that my mother was *living*, and such a mother as Lady Lorraine! And yet in my heart I could not rejoice.

Lady Lorraine, as my mother, was intolerable. Far rather would I believe my mother to be lying in her grave six thousand miles away across the sea.

Presently I heard a voice near me saying, in tones that I easily recognised.

"Save us and send us, Miss Ranees! What's all this about?"

It was Peggy, of course.

"Sit up, honey, and tell your old Peggy what ails you! Dear, dear, this is awful!" surveying my dishevelled appearance as I sat up and pushed my wet hair out of my eyes. "Ooh, hone, I see it all! You have had Lady Lorraine here with you this two hours, and she leaves you crying fit to break your heart! Ranees, darling, did she tell you anything?" she added, in a whisper.

My lips quivered. I could not—dare not answer.

"I see she has!" said Peggy. "She has told you who she is! Oh! and my mind misgave me weeks ago, and I was right! Oh, it's herself come to trouble us again!" wringing her hands, as she spoke. "Oh, what is to be done at all—at all? What did she tell you, Miss Ranees?"

"What I have taken an oath never to reveal—not even to Hugh!"

"Tis as well he should not know what you and I know, darling! Shure she is your mother?"

"Hush, Peggy, walls have ears! And you recognised her?"

"I knew she was alive, and grand and rich, and when I saw the lady that you showed your dress to—oh! but I got a shock, for I feared it was her; and then I hoped it was not! I just hoped and feared day after day, and that's what has kept me from going home to poor Tony! I dare not leave you to face her alone!"

"Ah, Peggy, think of what you are saying!"

"I do! I knew it well! She has no more heart or feeling than a stone, and she works trouble for whoever has to deal with her! Thank goodness the regiment is soon going away to Ireland, and then you will be out of her reach! Come, come away till I put you to bed!"

"Tell me first, Peggy, why you pretended she was dead? Why did father shut himself off from the world, if she was alive all the time?"

"He took you away to a lonely desert place, where you would see no one, and hear no bad things; and where you would have a chance of growing up unknown to her, and as unlike her as he could train you."

"And why did she go away?"

"Oh! for reasons you will hear again. Don't let her come over you with her beautiful eyes, and soft voice, and her tears. She is—Heaven forgive me for saying it to her own child—a wicked, heartless, faithless woman, who has no thought for anything in this wide world beyond herself. Now that's enough; go to bed, and go to sleep."

It was easy to go to bed, but sleep I could not. I cried stealthily, off and on, the whole night, and next morning my appearance told a fine tale! My face was ashen-coloured; my eyelids and lips looked as if they had been sewn in with red worsted. Hugh was grieved—grieved that I would not tell him what was the matter. No—not in spite of his most tender and anxious inquiries.

"It is something serious, Ranee; I've never known you cry yourself to this state, thank goodness, and you know I can't bear to see you shed even one tear. Come! Have you had a row with Ada Rose?"

"No."

"A scolding from Peggy?"

"No; don't be ridiculous."

"I see you won't tell me what is the matter, so I shall try and find out, my love!"

He was quite as good as his word, for when we met at lunch—after his return from barracks and orderly-room—he first of all regaled me with various little bits of news; then he told me a story which made me laugh; and then he said, in the most casual manner,—

"These nocturnal visits from Lady Lorraine do not agree with you, my dear child. I cannot have her ladyship coming here after nine o'clock, making a sitting of two hours, and leaving my wife to cry all night. She has been telling you something unpleasant. What was it?"

I could not answer, and looked guiltily at my plate.

"Well, she shan't have a chance of telling you anything more, for I have told Morris just now that in future you are not at home to Lady Lorraine."

"Oh! Hugh—no, you haven't! Oh! surely you are joking?"

"Certainly not. I have my suspicions about her magnificent ladyship. I have heard something very fishy about her; and to please me, my darling, will you promise not to see her, or speak to her, any more?"

In answer to this, I burst into tears, like the goose that I was, and thus evaded the necessity of making any direct reply.

"I am sure you must have had enough of her last evening to last you for life. Come, dry your eyes, and put on your hat, and I'll take you for a good long drive into the country. Mind you wear a veil, for if any one meets us, they will swear we have been having our first quarrel."

We had our first that same evening all the same—the first—and alas! alas! by no means our last!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I WENT UP STAIRS TO BATHE MY EYES, AND PUT ON MY HAT; AND SCRIBBLED OFF A NOTE TO LADY LORRAINE—I COULD NOT CALL HER MOTHER. I COMMENCED IT JUST AS USUAL, AND SAID—

"My husband says I am not to receive you again. He knows nothing. I send you a line to prepare you; and if we are to meet you will have to plan how and where. Of course, it must be without Hugh's knowledge. Perhaps it would be better that we should not see each other for some time.—Yours, DIANA HALIFORD."

This note I hastily scrawled and thrust into my blotter, not having time to address it, for

Hugh was whistling and sounding the gong, and giving every sign of impatience.

"You have been ages!" he exclaimed, as I descended the stairs. "Have you been improving you complexion? Let me see—no! You are still ghastly, the country air will do you good. I have sent a line over to Torpichen—I see he is back—asking him to dinner. He will cheer you up, and tell you the latest news from Brayfield, and all the county gossip."

This was, indeed, kind and thoughtful of Hugh, for I knew in his heart that he was not partial to my cousin, and I believe still regarded him with a most foolish and ridiculous amount of jealousy.

Ralph had been away on a cruise, he had also run home to The Park, from whence choice consignments of fruit and flowers often reached me. I had not seen him for nearly two months, and looked forward to a long talk with him that evening.

I was all the better for my country drive, and came in with bright eyes, a fresh colour, and a good appetite.

Before I dressed for dinner I folded, stamped, and addressed my note, and sent it to the post by my own maid. Then I dressed myself carefully, and went down to the drawing-room to receive Ralph, and hear his news.

For a long time we enjoyed a tête-à-tête, and after the first few questions and answers were over, he said rather suddenly, eying me keenly as he spoke,

"How is your grand friend, Lady Lorraine? Do you see as much of her as ever?"

I became suddenly very red and confused, and stammered out "that I had seen her recently."

Looking me full in the face, and holding my eyes as it were with his, he said,

"Have you ever heard who she was before she married Sir Reoper Lorraine?"

I completely lost my self-control, and for the second time that day I burst into tears, and my poor little cousin, I pity you, from the bottom of my heart."

What bad luck it was for me that just at this moment we were joined by Hugh. He heard Ralph say sympathetically, "My poor little cousin I pity you, from the bottom of my heart," and he found me in tears.

This curious coincidence he could not fail to notice. Why could he not have come sooner—or later? No one would have guessed from his manner that he had heard anything out of the common. He acquitted himself as best so well that I began to believe that my fears were groundless.

He sang, he played the guitar and I sang, and then we both sang duets. I had had lessons recently, and my voice was much improved.

In due time Ralph took his departure, and I was about to take myself away to bed, when Hugh, just as I reached the door, called out—

"Wait a moment, Ranee. I have something to say to you."

I looked round. He was sitting in the same chair that she had occupied the previous night. I began to believe there was something fatal in that chair to me.

"Come here," he said, in a tone that I was not used to.

"I asked you, to-day, most particularly, to have nothing whatever to do with Lady Lorraine; and you promised me—at least I took silence for consent. Now I find, to my great concern, that you are not to be trusted. I met your maid going out with a letter in her hand this evening as I was coming in from the stables; and as it was raining I took it from her, and put it in the pillar myself. I did not look at the address from any curiosity; you and I have no secrets between us—goodness knows, I have none from you—and when I glanced at the note I saw that it was addressed to Lady Lorraine. I posted it,

but, remember, it is the last you will write to her! Do you hear me, Ranee?" he added, sternly.

"Yes, I hear you. I am not deaf."

"Do you heed me?"

"No; I shall probably write to Lady Lorraine again, and if I said I would not I should be telling an untruth."

"Then you defy me?"

"Yes."

"And disobey me?" he said, in a firm low tone.

"Only in this—yes."

"Well, at any rate, you are candid. Do you think your candour will carry you so far as to tell me what you were saying to Ralph Torpichen this evening, in this very room? Why were you weeping, and why was he talking of a terrible position, and pitying from the bottom of his heart his poor little cousin?"

Dead silence.

"Diana, you must tell me, and I will know."

I raised my eyes and looked at him. I tried to speak, but I knew not what to say.

I was already suffering sorely for my promise. I would have given the world to retract it, and tell him all; but my lips were sealed.

"If this goes on, I shall go mad," I cried, suddenly casting myself into an easy chair.

"I was surely born under an unlucky star."

"I shall go mad, too, if this goes on!" said Hugh, grimly. "My wife, who never had a secret from me, all of a sudden holds long interviews with two people—has some heavy burden on her mind, sheds tears with Lady Lorraine, and shares her secret with her, sheds tears with Ralph Torpichen, shares her secret with him, receives his sympathy, and I am left out in the cold! By Jove! I think it's enough to drive me mad!" And he began to walk about the room.

"If Ada Rose had your confidence I would not mind so much. She is an honest, good little creature, for all her feathered head; but when your secret is shared with that well-known intriguer, Lady Lorraine, I know that it must be bad!"

"This I may tell you that it is not, it is harmless."

"Is it connected with that woman?"

"It is."

"And with you and Sir Ralph?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" I could give no idea of the angry scorn that Hugh threw into that "Ah!" It spoke volumes.

"I don't wonder now that your father kept you so strictly in the background. No doubt he had reason to believe in your aptitude for getting into hot water, and for carrying on intrigues with wealthy men and wicked women, who could turn your head with a few sugared compliments."

"Hugh," I cried, with a stamp of my foot, "how can you be so cruel? You know you don't mean what you say. How could I, a mere child, brought up in the wilds from infancy, never seeing a stranger till I met you, how can I possibly be what you say?"

"You may have only wanted opportunity. Doubtless the taint is in your blood! Your father was a good, honest gentleman; but how do I know what your mother was?"

"Oh, Hugh, dear Hugh!" I cried, clasping my hands. "Do not speak like this! If you knew all, instead of reproaching me you would pity me! Indeed you would!"

"Just as Ralph Torpichen does. Pity we all know is akin to love. He was your lover once. He would gladly have married you."

"He would; and had I been his wife he never would have spoken to me, or taunted me as you have done now. He is a gentleman!" I cried, in a towering passion.

"And I am not? Thank you!"

"Oh, Hugh!" I exclaimed, already dismayed at the yawning breach between us. "Have patience! Do not goad me to say such things! You joked to-day about our first quarrel! Is not this it?"

"And whose fault is it, pray? It lies en-



[CONVINCED I HAD TO DO WITH A MAD WOMAN, I COWERED BEHIND A CHAIN AND KEPT A GREEDY EYE ON THE BELL.]

tirely with you to clear up the whole matter! I will humbly beg your pardon if I have wronged you, Ranee, and if I have allowed my hot temper to carry me too far. Only whisper two words in my ear! Only make me—your husband—as wise as *strangers*. Only tell me your secret?"

"I cannot!" I cried, wringing my hands in despair.

"I thought not!" he returned, fiercely. "There is the test!"

So saying he went out of the room, and slammed the door after him with a bang that shook the whole house.

After this Hugh did not speak to me for several days, and I was wretched. Peggy was in my confidence, and she did all in her power to console and support me.

I lived, as it were, on the edge of a volcano. I had no taste for intrigue or secrets, and Lady Lorraine had. She delighted in snatching a few words from me in the street, in thrusting a note into my reluctant hand, in sending me letters inside books—music and flowers. These letters made me miserable. I dreaded them as I would a scorpion, for I never knew when one might drop out before Hugh!

There was never much in them, and it seemed to me that she wrote them out of a pure spirit of mischief and love of danger—danger that could not touch her; but I lived, as it were, in a powder mill!

One morning, a few days after our first quarrel, Hugh, who was now barely civil to me, said as we sat at breakfast,—

"I met a man yesterday who told me all about your precious confidante, Lady Lorraine. She is a divorced woman, and as heartless as she is bad!"

My heart stood still. I put down my untouched cup, which rattled in the saucer.

Divorced! I had never thought of this, and my mother! I became crimson.

"Did you know that she ran away from an

excellent husband, and forsook her two poor disgraced little children?—one of them in arms (that was *I*), and went away in a most cold-blooded manner with a scoundrel who was an old lover?"

"No," I answered, disturbed.

"Since then she had been a kind of adventuress on the face of the globe, until good luck threw that old ass, Sir Roper, in her way. She married him, and turned over a new leaf. She found for a while that it paid to be good. But I am afraid, from what I hear, that she is at her old tricks again!"

"Did you have her name?"

"No, but she is making her present one sufficiently notorious. And now, Diana, one word. The General here is going to take me as aide-de-camp to the Camp of Exercise, near Brighton. I tried to cry off, but it was no good. I don't want to leave you here with her alone. Promise me that you will not admit her into the house in my absence. Promise me that you will not write to her. I ask this pledge from you in remembrance of our old days by the Kharran. I say no more. Even if you don't mind me, think of your father. What would he have said had he known that, in spite of me, you would take Lady Lorraine for your bosom friend? That you repose a confidence in her you refuse to me? What would he have said, I ask you?"

Of course I could not answer what he would have said, which would have been, "She is the girl's mother!" And I held my tongue.

"Will you give me your promise?" he urged, "and let me go off to my duty with a load of my mind? Come, Ranee?"

"When are you going?"

"Immediately! My traps are packed. My charger has gone to the station. The dog cart is waiting for me, and I am waiting for you!"

"Yes, Hugh, I'll promise."

"And you won't break your word, as you did before? Mind, if you do I'll never forgive you!"

"Yes, you may depend on me this time, Hugh!"

"All right, then. Good-bye!" seizing his gloves.

"Come back! Come back!" I cried, running after him to the doors. "You have forgotten something!"

"What is it?" he asked, impatiently. "Why, to kiss me!" I said, lifting my face to his.

"Oh, is that it? Well, you are really so pretty I cannot resist you!" stooping down and kissing me twice. "Good-bye, Ranee. Now mind you are a good girl while I am away."

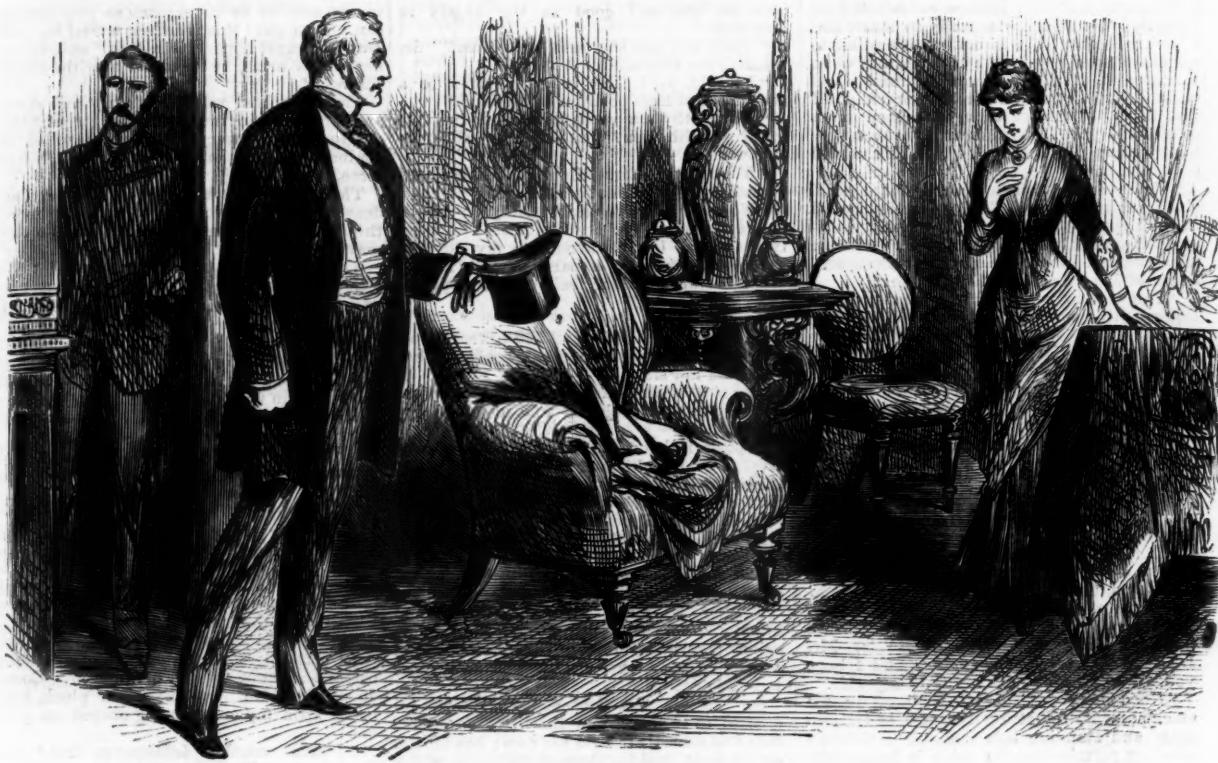
So saying he went out into the hall, lit a cigar, climbed into his frightfully dog cart, and with a farewell shake of his whip to me drove rapidly away.

Decidedly I was getting back into his good graces. He called me "Ranee" once more. Oh, that I could stay there! Oh, that fate and circumstances would kindly leave me alone!

I passed the morning practising Hugh's accompaniments, embroidering him a smoking cap, and making stern resolutions with regard to my parent. Resolutions, alas! that the first contact with her strong will and powers of persuasion scattered to the fierce winds. But how I succumbed—how I got into deeper trouble than ever—must be told in a chapter to itself.

(To be continued.)

It was one of the loveliest customs of the ancients to bury the young at the morning twilight; for as they strove to give the softest interpretation to death, so they imagined that Aurora, who loved the young, had stolen them to her embrace.



[SIR REGINALD FOUND HIMSELF BESIDE ADELAIDE, THE WIFE HE SO DEARLY LOVED, BUT WHO HAD BEEN LOST TO HIM.]

NOVELLETTE.]

MAURICE HENLEY'S
CONFESSTION..

—:—

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOSS OF THE "SEA QUEEN."

A week had passed, and Adelaide was becoming more composed. The feeling that they were hourly getting nearer their haven of safety took a great weight off her mind, and she was looking brighter and better altogether.

She was sitting on the deck, the sea-breezes were ruffling her golden hair, making it appear a mass of waves and ripples; and the sun shining on her lovely, upturned face, breathing an inward prayer for her brother's deliverance, made her look exquisite, and so thought Captain Dalston as he came towards her.

"I hope the voyage is doing you good, Miss L'Estrange?" he said, softly. "I do not think you seem much like an invalid now?"

"No, indeed," she replied, smiling up at him. "Thanks to all your kindness I am getting quite well again."

"I fail to see where my kindness has been," he returned. "I only wish I could do something for you," and he sat down exactly opposite to her, to watch the ever-varying expression of her clear blue eyes.

"You do a great deal for me now," replied Adelaide. "I think it most good of you to let me wander at will here on deck instead of keeping me to a certain part of the ship, or to my cabin all the day long."

"I should be sorry to keep you such a close prisoner," he laughed; "for if you never came out I should never see you, so it is selfishness on my part, after all."

"I hardly think so," said Adelaide; "but, anyway, I am very glad you let me come, for I do love to sit and watch the beautiful waves dashing against the vessel. I had no idea when I came I should see anything half so glorious!"

"Nor had I," replied Captain Dalston, but his eyes were resting on Adelaide, and not on the beauties of the ocean.

"You admire it too?" she said, turning to look at him, "and yet you see it all so often; but I suppose it is a picture which would never weary you. There must be always something fresh and unusual to claim your attention and interest you."

"Quite so," replied the Captain. "I should not tire of it if I had to look at it all my life," and, rising, he left her without another word.

Just then William and Raymond Egerton came on deck, and Captain Dalston joined them, and they walked up and down for some time, chatting over the various topics of the day, but after awhile he paused, and turning to Raymond told him he wished to have a few words privately with his father, and asked him if he would mind going away for awhile.

Raymond, who never felt very comfortable when talking to the keen-sighted sailor, for fear he should penetrate his disguise, gladly left their side, and joined his sister, who welcomed him with one of her winning smiles.

"So here you are, old lady!" he said. "I went to look for you just now, but found the bird flown!"

"Did you, dear?" she replied, slipping her hand confidingly into his. "Did you want me to do anything for you?"

"Yes, something very important," he answered, laughing; then bending down close to her he went on, in an undertone, "I want you to cut my hair, dear, for I have the greatest difficulty in preventing a dark fringe

appearing all round my head, which might look peculiar, to say the least of it."

"I should think it would," laughed Adelaide. "Of course I will cut it for you with pleasure, but I shall be so glad when I can have you as my own boy again, without that wonderful fair wig, which is so disfiguring to you."

"So shall I, old lady; not because of the look of the thing, but because it is so fearfully hot. I quite long to throw it away sometimes, but I suppose I have much to thank it for," and then he became silent, and the lines of care deepened on his brow, as they always did when he thought of his sad life.

"Poor old boy!" said Adelaide, gently. "Cheer up, we shall soon be at Madrid now, and then there will be no more trouble for any of us, and we shall be happy once more."

"I hope so, my little comforter," he replied, sadly, "but we are not there yet, and know not what is in store for us."

"Have faith, dear Raymond," replied the girl, sweetly, "and try to believe that all things will work together for our good."

"I wish I could think so, Adie," he answered, and again he relapsed into silence.

"Mr. L'Estrange," began Captain Dalston, when he had dismissed Raymond Egerton, "I want to talk to you a little about myself. I wish you to know I am not exactly in the position I appear to be—that of a commander of a small merchant vessel. I have been in the Royal Navy all my life up till a year ago, when ill-health obliged me to retire; but I sadly missed the roving life, and made up my mind to travel awhile, and as I have some relations living in Spain I determined to visit them for a short time. But I am not a rich man at the present moment, so I endeavoured to procure the command of some little craft, just to carry me there and back for nothing, and, indeed, to put a few pounds in my pocket also. Well, as luck would have

it, the captain of this little vessel fell ill, just a few days before she was ready to start, and I took his place. It is not my intention to remain abroad any length of time, and when I return to England I hope to marry and settle down. I know I am not very well off just now, but I have enough to keep up a comfortable establishment, and make a very happy home for the girl I love, if she will only have me."

"There is not much fear about that, I should think," replied William, as he looked at the Captain's fine manly figure and handsome face, but wondering at the same time what possessed his companion to make a confidant of him—a comparative stranger.

"I am glad to hear you say so," answered the sailor, with a smile; "but before I ask your consent I will tell you I am expecting to inherit a large fortune from my father, and shortly, too, for I fear the dear old man cannot live much longer. He is very aged, and all the doctors say they can do nothing more for him; that he is quite worn out. Of course I would far rather he lived than have his property, but perhaps you would not. Do you understand me?"

William gazed at him in utter bewilderment, the truth never dawning upon him for a second.

"I really must confess I do not," he replied. "You are very good to give me your confidence, but at present you are speaking to me in enigmas."

"Then I will tell you more plainly," said Captain Dalston. "The fact is, Mr. L'Estrange, I love your daughter, and I hope you will allow me to ask her to be my wife."

"Good heavens!" cried William, in his astonishment, forgetting the rôle of the old man, and standing bolt upright. "I can't give you permission; the thing is impossible, quite impossible!"

"Why?" demanded the Captain, turning and facing his companion, and then he looked at him keenly, but said no more, for he saw the change that had come over the man by his side.

He guessed at once that he was helping a fugitive, who had, for a moment, been thrown off his guard, and forgotten, in his excitement, the part he was playing, for there was no longer the bent figure and wrinkled-up face, but a tall, upright fellow, with every line smoothed out, and the usually half closed eyes wide open, showing a pair of rich brown orbs full of life and power.

It only lasted a few seconds, but William recovered himself too late, and he saw that the Captain had seen the change in him, but he took no notice of the fact, and, settling himself down, answered as if nothing had happened.

"Why? Why because my daughter's affections are already engaged, and I am certain she will never have any love to give you, so I will leave it to your good taste not to mention the subject to her."

"So you think I have no chance?" replied the Captain, thoughtfully.

"Not the slightest," he returned, gravely. "I am very sorry for you, Captain Dalston, but there is only one thing for you to do, and that is to forget her as quickly as possible. Believe me, she will never cease to be true to the man she cares for," and he held out his hand, and the sailor clasped it warmly.

"L'Estrange," he said, "I will be open with you; I have accidentally learnt this morning that you have a secret. I do not even wish to know what it is; all I have to say is you need not fear me, I will not betray you for her sake," and he looked across the deck at Adelaide, who was still talking with her brother. "But there is one question I should like you to answer me. Is she really your daughter, or is she not?"

William looked at him steadily for a minute, and then he replied,—

"I think I can trust you. She is not; but Adelaide and her brother are your equals by birth, fortune, and education, and they are

both as true and good as the angels in Heaven."

"Then are you the man she loves?" demanded the Captain.

"I! No, sir! Her heart is given to a gentleman of high position in England."

"Then why on earth is she flying the country with you?" asked the sailor, in amazement.

"That is my secret, Captain Dalston, and you said you would not question me."

"Nor will I," he replied, warmly. "Whatever the mystery is I will not seek to solve it; and now I must attend to my duty, so good-bye," and with a parting wave he left William standing alone, feeling more perplexed than ever.

That evening Adelaide retired to rest at an early hour, having a nervous headache, but she could not sleep.

The atmosphere was heavy and oppressive, and the lowering clouds told of a coming storm.

Captain Dalston had stated his intention of keeping a watch himself the whole night, and asked Adelaide if he sent for her, to come to him without delay.

She had promised to do so, and had then gone to lie down. She did not undress, feeling it was wiser to be ready in case she was called, so she laid in her berth, and remained quiet for some hours.

Neither Raymond Egerton nor William attempted to go to their cabins, for, having gained permission to remain on deck to lend a helping hand, they soon found their time was fully occupied.

As the darkness deepened the storm increased in violence, and the little *Sea Queen* found it difficult to hold her own; but on and on she went, dashing through the waves, which at times threatened to swamp her completely, but the men worked hard at the pumps, and for a while succeeded in restraining the water.

At last all endeavours to keep in the fire were fruitless, and the fury of the wind and rain became greater every second; the thunder roared with deafening sound, flash after flash of forked lightning descended upon the vessel. With a mighty crash the masts fell, and then there was a slight lull.

The ship's boat was ordered to be lowered immediately, and Captain Dalston, seeing William near him, told him to fetch Adelaide as quickly as possible.

He went to her at once, and found her waiting perfectly ready.

"Lady Erskine," he said, gently, "you will have to be very brave, but I think all will be well with you in the end. Dalston is a good fellow, and will give you if he can; but remember, whatever happens, you are in God's hands, and He will do with you as He thinks best, so trust in Him and do not fear. And now come, for every minute is of importance," and he took her hand in his, and led the way.

Suddenly he stopped, and, unfastening a strap which was round his neck, he took from his breast an oilskin bag.

"Put this in your pocket, and keep it for my sake," he said, hurriedly. "If ever I want it you can return it to me; if not, it may be useful to you."

"What is it?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

"Never mind what it is," he answered, quickly, "but take it to prove your friendship for me; and now good-bye. I feel a presentiment that we shall be parted for a time. May Heaven bless you now and for ever!" and before Adelaide could answer him she found herself beside the Captain, and William had disappeared in the darkness.

"Where is Raymond?" she asked. "Oh! do save him first, Captain Dalston. I can wait."

"No," he returned, quietly. "I will try and save you now, and then I will look after your brother. He was all right a minute ago; so do not fear; and now trust yourself entirely

to me, and be as courageous as you possibly can. Poor girl! this is indeed a trial for you! But you must hope for the best," and, taking her in his arms, he lifted her over the side of the vessel.

The little boat was tossing up and down, and appeared in imminent danger of being overturned as every fresh wave rolled up against the side of the ship with fearful force.

The men were a well-ordered crew, and endeavoured to obey their commander in all things, but in such a storm it was no easy matter to carry out his instructions.

"Clouds! my men, clear!" shouted the Captain. "I cannot possibly let this lady down—she would fall into the sea. Pull the ropes, and bring her round a little. There! that is right, as the boat once more rose on a high wave, and in another second a stalwart sailor had caught Adelaide by the waist, and placed her in their midst.

At that moment Raymond Egerton came to Captain Dalston's side.

"Have you seen my sister?" he inquired, anxiously. "I have just been to her cabin to fetch her, and she is not there."

"She is as safe as she can be," he replied, with feeling. "She is in the boat, and the sooner you follow her the better."

"No, sir," he replied, warmly. "I would rather wait till everyone is lowered; my life is of far less value than the lives of the rest. I wish to be the last to leave the deck."

"Nonsense!" answered the Captain. "I shall certainly see everyone out of the vessel before I attempt to quit her myself. Come! do not hesitate. I admire your pluck, but I insist upon my orders being obeyed, so go at once."

"I must see after L'Estrange first," said Raymond. "That is, of course, with your permission."

"I shall not grant it for a second," he replied, firmly. "L'Estrange is gone to do something for me, and will be here directly. And now let me help you!"

Once more he summoned the boat to their side, but at that minute the wind arose with greater fury, breaking the ropes asunder; the thunder was more deafening than ever, and the lightning more vivid.

But the crew did not lose their presence of mind, and strained every muscle to gain the vessel's side, succeeding at last.

"Don't think of me," said Raymond, hastily. "For Heaven's sake, jump in your self!" but before he could speak another word he felt himself being taken, like a child, in the Captain's strong arms, and in another moment he was thrown, almost head-first, into the little craft.

But, alas! before he knew what he was about his wig was carried away on the wings of the wind, and Raymond Egerton was once more left with his closely-cut dark hair.

"I am so thankful you are come, dear!" said Adelaide, softly. "Never mind the loss of the fair looks," she whispered; "your life is everything to me. We will hope no notice will be taken of your changed appearance."

"No such luck, Adie," he answered, sadly. "But this is no time to think about myself. I wish William were here, and everyone saved."

But the storm grew worse and worse. Again and again those left on deck endeavoured to leave the ship without success.

At last, with the aid of life-belts, a few more managed to reach the boat in safety, thus escaping a watery grave, and only William and Captain Dalston were left behind.

"Now, my man," said the latter, "you have indeed done all things well, and I look upon you as a noble fellow. Put this belt on in case you fall into the sea, and the next time the boat comes near enough I will try to swing you over into it."

"Never, sir!" replied William hastily. "That is the last belt left, and I would not

have it for anything in this world. Let me help you on with it."

"Put it round yourself at once, L'Estrange. I insist upon it! I shall do very well as I am;" but before either could speak again flash after flash of forked lightning once more descended upon the wreck, followed by a terrific thunderbolt.

The wind increased in violence, and the waves washed over it yet again, this time doing their work effectually, for the already over-laden vessel could no longer bear up against the storm; and, after trembling like a frightened animal, it sank into the ocean's depths.

Then there was another lull, and the moon peered out from behind the masses of dark clouds, giving light to the terrified occupants of the boat.

"Where is our gallant captain?" cried Raymond Egerton, with agitation.

"And William?" said Adelaide, in a choking voice, forgetting his *non de plume* in her excitement.

"Yes, where?" echoed the sailors; and, as if in answer to their questions, the forms of the two men appeared above the surface of the water.

With much difficulty they succeeded in rescuing them, and when they did, they laid them both insensible at their feet.

Everything was done that could be to restore them to animation, and at last their noble commander moved slightly, and afterwards regained consciousness; but not so poor William Harvey, known now as Albert L'Estrange, for his set features and glassy upturned eyes soon told them all that he was dead!

CHAPTER V.

RECOGNISED!

WHEN daybreak dawned the next morning Raymond Egerton's changed appearance was the subject of much comment among the men.

"I'm darning if the storm didn't change your colour!" said one who first caught sight of him; then all eyes were directed towards him, and roars of laughter followed their supervision.

Each threw some slighting jest in turn, but Raymond Egerton faced them all, and joined them in their mirth against himself, saying he always wore fair hair, because he greatly preferred it.

"Maybe you do," answered one, coolly, "but I'm afeared you will find it inconvenient to have lost it, for I never saw such a change in anyone in all my life!" and once more they laughed aloud.

Adelaide had grown very pale during their conversation; and Captain Dalston, seeing her distressed looks, addressed the men himself.

"I altogether fail to see your joke," he said, quietly. "I agree with Mr. L'Estrange, and think fair hair suits him best. If I were he I should continue wearing it. However, it is no business of either yours or mine, therefore the sooner you drop the subject the better," and then he spoke of other things, and the men became silent.

For three days they managed well enough, for they had secured some provisions, but not sufficient to last them for a longer period, and at the end of that time starvation looked them in the face; but still they did not lose courage.

The first mate had taken command as long as the captain was too weak to attend to matters; but as soon as he was able, he used every exertion to keep up the spirits of the little crew.

He would scarcely touch any food, in order to save the mors for his companions; and when their little store came to an end he was troubled at heart, indeed, but appeared so cheerful that everyone else felt ashamed to complain.

He was inexpressibly gentle to Adelaide,

who, although she felt the situation keenly, never showed her suffering by look or sign, and her sweet gentle ways and patient words had a marvellous effect upon her ill-fated associates.

The fourth day dawned, and thirst was the predominant feeling with them all; but there was nothing to be done but to bear it quietly, for it was a case of "Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink," and one by one the men fainted off from sheer exhaustion. Two died and had to be thrown overboard, and by the fifth morning a look of despair had settled on the faces of most of the survivors.

Raymond Egerton did his best to comfort his sister; but it was growing serious for them all, and the bravest amongst them were becoming languid and ill.

"Never mind me, dear Ray," said Adelaide, in answer to some whispered words of sympathy for her discomfort. "I feel quite well; I am only so grieved for you all, and for poor William! It is, indeed, terrible for him to have met with such a sad end!"

"It is most melancholy, dear," replied her brother, thoughtfully. "I mourn for him as I should for a brother; but I fear we shall not have a much better fate than his. There seems no sign of any vessel which could pick us up, and we must be many days from land."

"Don't lose heart, old boy," she answered, with a forced smile; "all may end well for us, although we cannot see it. Poor William told me to trust, dear; and if we were to have perfect faith in God's goodness, and *really believe*, He could save us, and I feel sure, even now, we would do so."

"Don't you think we are not unlike Saint Peter, who nearly sank through his want of confidence?"

"I do; but we, I fear, are unlike him in one way—we have never really prayed 'Lord save me!' as he did, and that may be the reason we have, as it were, been left to our own devices and adrift for a time."

"Do you think so, Adie?" replied her brother. "Then pray for us, little woman, and I will silently add my prayers to yours!"

They had been talking very quietly, and had thought they were unheard until Captain Dalston joined in the conversation.

"Yes, do pray for us, Miss L'Estrange," he said, gently. "I think that is what we need more than anything at the present time."

"I will," said Adelaide, "and I hope you will, too," and she became silent.

"Are you not going to begin?" asked the commander, presently.

"What, aloud?" inquired the girl. "I hardly like to. Cannot you do so instead of me, Captain Dalston?"

"No; they would listen to you more than to me," he replied, earnestly, and turning to the men he asked them to unite their prayers to those of Miss L'Estrange.

One or two laughed at the idea; others said if it did them no good it couldn't do them much harm, so they did not object; and others seemed glad, saying they would like to do so, not that they minded meeting death in the usual way, for there was often not much time to think about it, but this lingering affair was not so pleasant.

"We may escape yet," replied Adelaide, with a smile; "and now, if you really wish it, I will try to ask for our much-needed help," and after a brief space she began in a clear, soft voice.

Her language, if not exactly eloquent, was such as entered into every man's heart around her, and when she left off there was scarcely a dry eye among them; although, doubtless, they would have scornfully disowned the fact.

The prayer ended, they joined in that beautiful hymn—

"Although the ocean waves surround us,
Thou hast power to save us still."

And before they had completed the last verse, as if to reward them for their faith, a vessel came in sight, and each second brought it nearer to them.

They did everything they possibly could to attract the attention of those on board; but for a long while in vain.

It was not until the ship was really passing them that the occupants of the magnificent man-of-war noticed the tiny boat upon the waters; then, seeing their evident distress, the captain commanded them to be brought on board, and in a short space of time they were once more in safety, and all but two hearts were rejoicing over the fact. Those two were Raymond Egerton and his sister, for they knew that they were homeward-bound, and in less than a fortnight they would be on English soil.

Everything was done for the comfort of the poor shipwrecked crew, and very soon they were all hearty and well again, with the exception of Adelaide, who grew weaker each day.

She never left the cabin which had been provided for her, and fearing she was really ill, Raymond asked the ship's doctor to go and look at her, which he readily consented to do.

He found her in a flushed and nervous state and highly feverish. He said the exposure and excitement had been too much for her, and if she were not kept perfectly quiet, and free from all worry, he feared she would have brain fever; and promising to bring her some composing mixture, he left Raymond more perplexed than ever, for how was he to keep Adelaide from anxiety, dearly as he loved her?

Just at that moment Captain Dalston came to his side.

"L'Estrange," he said, looking at him critically, "let me have a word with you in your cabin at once."

"What do you want with me?" asked Raymond, as soon as they were alone. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," replied the Captain, quietly, "I want you to give me your confidence. Will you grant me my request?"

"I fail to see what has made you ask for it," replied Raymond, coolly. "Will you tell me that first?"

"Certainly. You remember the loss of your fair wig on the night of the storm? Of course, you do. Well, I did my best for you among the men when they discovered your changed appearance, and whatever they might have thought I don't fancy they have mentioned the subject to anyone, and I have refrained from speaking to you about it up till now, which will, I think, prove I have not come to you out of curiosity, but from a true feeling of friendship."

"You are very kind," answered Raymond, heartily, "and I sincerely hope you will always let me look upon you as a friend," he continued, sadly. "I fear there are not many to be found worth having."

"I will always stand by you on one condition," replied Captain Dalston, earnestly. "You must tell me your reason for leaving England in disguise, for I cannot help you much unless I really know the truth."

Raymond did not reply for a short time, for Captain Dalston was but a stranger to him, and he did not know how far it would be safe to entrust him with his life's secret.

He, seeing him hesitate, and quickly guessing the cause, instantly put him at his ease.

"L'Estrange," he began, "I think you are afraid to tell me your history; but you need not be, for even if you are in fault I will do what I can for you. Perhaps you had better know I have already found out that you and your sister are not the children of the poor fellow who was drowned, and I will give you my word I will not betray you. Cannot you believe me?"

"Yes, I do believe you," said Raymond Egerton, warmly. "Let us sit down, and I will tell you all."

When he had finished his narrative Captain Dalston clasped his hand warmly.

"Poor boy!" he exclaimed, with deep feeling. "You have indeed suffered, and I

fear your troubles are not over yet! To my mind there is not the slightest doubt Maurice Henley worked that plot in order to get rid of you, and I shall do my best to hunt him down!"

"You!" said Raymond, in astonishment. "You don't even know him, do you? And I almost think the quieter we keep the better, for if we make a stir they will be all the sharper in seizing me, and I assure you I have no wish to see the inside of Portland Prison, or any other, for I fear there is not a second William to be found in all the world."

"Indeed, no," replied Captain Dalston, thoughtfully. "He was truly a noble fellow!"

"There is no doubt about that," said Raymond, earnestly. "It only grieves me that he should have lost his life for my sake; far better that I should have died than he!"

"You must not say that, Egerton; you have your sister. What would she do without you?"

"Poor Adelaide!" he answered, saily. "It would have been better for her, too, had we never met!"

"Nonsense, my dear fellow," said Captain Dalston. "I think your meeting her was a splendid thing for you both, and I admire her courage in linking her fate with yours."

"So do I Dalston; but it has, nevertheless, ruined her life."

"How so, Egerton? Will not the man she cares for wait for her?"

"Wait for her!" echoed Raymond. "What do you mean? I told you she left a home of luxury for my sake, and at present that is all you must know. As far as I am concerned I have kept nothing from you; but it would not be fair to tell my sister's secrets. How came you to know she cared for anyone?"

"William told me so far," replied Captain Dalston, sadly.

"How very strange of him!" remarked Raymond, more to himself than to his companion.

"Not so strange as you think, Egerton."

"Why?"

"Ah!" laughed the Captain, "that would be telling too much. I must be careful as well as you."

And, rising, he went towards the door; then he turned, and, going once to Raymond's side, asked him if he ever remembered seeing Robert Morley, the first lieutenant of the ship, before they came on board.

"Well," replied Egerton, "that is a question I cannot answer. His face seems perfectly familiar to me, and yet I cannot recollect ever having met him. But why do you wish to know? Has he recognised me at all?"

"I fear he has," replied Captain Dalston, thoughtfully, "and that is the reason I persuaded you to tell me your history this afternoon, so that I might try and help you a little. I heard him say to a friend of his only a couple of hours ago that he would know your features anywhere, and that when you arrived in England he intended to keep his eye on you; so, old fellow, look out for squalls, and be careful of what you say and do in his presence. Don't avoid him, or that will arouse his suspicions still more; but do not run against him oftener than you can help. I fear he is pretty sharp, for even that little scar over your left temple has not escaped his notice."

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN DALSTON'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

The days passed slowly by, and Adelaide remained much in the same state of health.

Dr. Gould had done his very best for her; but neither he nor anyone else could remove the trouble that was oppressing her, and the nearer they drew to England the more nervous and feverish she became.

Raymond never left her side, night or day, and so avoided meeting Mr. Morley; but his absence at the mess-table, though fully accounted

for by the good-natured little doctor, gave all the more opportunity for his would-be persecutor to talk, and by the time they arrived at Portsmouth Harbour there was hardly a man on board who had not heard that young L'Estrange was none other than the escaped convict, Raymond Egerton.

At first they spoke of it as a rumour, but it was not long before they mentioned it as a certainty, and when Captain Beasley heard of it he sent for Raymond to learn the truth of the report.

When he came in answer to the summons he quickly saw that *openness* was the only thing left for him; so he told the Captain his history from beginning to end without reserve.

Captain Beasley, although a very stern officer, possessed a great deal of common sense, and used sound judgment on all occasions.

The manly manner in which Raymond Egerton told his story went a long way to convince him that he was not being deceived. Moreover, although he did not mention it to Raymond, he was well acquainted with Maurice Henley, and neither liked nor trusted him, and he determined to call upon him without delay and question him thoroughly upon the subject before he took any steps against the prisoner.

So he ended the conversation by telling Raymond he would think the matter well over, and in the meantime he must rely on his honour not to leave England again without his knowledge; also he requested Raymond to give him his future address.

"My sister and I are going to stay with Captain Dalston for the present," replied the young man, quietly, "and I hope for her sake you will hesitate before you give any notice as to my whereabouts, for I think any further trials would be very serious for her just now."

"Poor girl!" said Captain Beasley, kindly. "I fear from what Dr. Gould says she is very far from well; so for her sake and your own, Egerton, I will do what I can for you. Don't be too sanguine at present. And now, as you say you are going to stay with Dalston for a while, just go and send him to me. I should like a word with him before we land. And, take my advice, do not tell your sister more of this unfortunate affair than can possibly be helped, as the quieter she is kept the better."

And then Raymond, feeling himself to be dismissed, thanked Captain Beasley for his kindness, and went in search of his friend. A few minutes later Captain Dalston entered the cabin, and the two men had a long and earnest conversation.

Much to Dalston's disappointment he found Captain Beasley determined to make all inquiries about Raymond Egerton himself, and he made Captain Dalston promise not to let him leave his father's house on any pretence until he heard from him, for, although he believed Raymond to be innocent, and wished to prove him so, he had no desire to help a runaway convict—if he were guilty.

And with these terms Captain Dalston had to be satisfied, for, although he longed to help his young friend, he saw it would be prudent to say no more on the subject.

That afternoon they arrived at Portsmouth Harbour, and Raymond and Adelaide were almost the last to leave the ship, as Captain Dalston was busy looking after his own men, providing them with a small amount of money each, to last them until he had made his report to the company who employed them, and that he was obliged to borrow from Captain Beasley, his own having all been lost in the *Sea-Queen*.

"Are you feeling better to-day, Adie?" asked Raymond, taking his sister's hand affectionately in his. "I think you are looking a little brighter than you were."

"I fancy I am flushed, dear," she answered, sadly, "for I am so nervous and excited I hardly know how to sit still."

"Poor little woman!" replied her brother, kindly; "but our troubles are nearly over now, dear, and when once we are in Dalston's house we shall both feel quite well, I hope."

"I trust so, Raymond; but I cannot forget that we are again in England, and that any minute you may be recognised. Oh, Ray! the thought of it nearly kills me!"

"Why, old girl, where is your trust?" said Raymond Egerton, with forced cheerfulness. "You've been telling me to have faith all along, and now you seem to have forgotten all your little sermons, and are making yourself look quite ill just when I thought you were improving a little," and he kissed her lovingly on either cheek. "There! I am sure that delicate attention of mine has ever so much revived you! Hasn't it, dear?" and for the first time for many months he laughed merrily.

Adelaide looked at him in astonishment.

"Why, Ray, what has come over you? I have not seen you so bright for a long while."

"You see, dear," he replied, "it would not be well for us both to be down-hearted; so if you won't try and cheer me, I must see what I can do to amuse you. But when you get to Dalston's you must endeavour to rouse yourself a little, for it would be a bad way of repaying all his kindness to us if we were always dull—would it not, dearie?"

"You are right," she said, smiling up at him. "I will do my best to get better for your sake."

"That is my own brave girl again!" he said, brightly. "And now I must tell you something which I have wanted to confess for ages; but I fear you will be dreadfully vexed, although I really could not help it."

"What is it, Ray?" she inquired, gently. "I should never be cross with you, dear, whatever you had done, so do not be afraid to tell me."

"How good you are, Adie!" he replied, softly. "Well, you will remember when we left Old England you gave me your purse to take care of, and on the night of the storm I lost it. Here we are back again without a penny in the world, and what are we to do? We have no clothes except those we have on. Is it not terrible for us, dear?"

"Not so serious as you think, old boy; so do not fret about it any longer. I forgot to tell you poor William presented me with his money-bag as a parting gift just before I left the wreck. He said he had a presentiment that we should part."

"Did he, indeed?" replied Raymond, with feeling. "What a noble fellow he was, Adie! I regret his death more every day. I shall never meet with such a friend again."

"I fear not," said Adelaide, with tears in her eyes. "There could not be two William Harveys in the whole world!"

Before either could speak again they heard a tap at the door, and Captain Dalston entered.

"Raymond," he said, "Captain Beasley wants you to go to him at once."

"I hope there is nothing the matter!" said Adelaide, growing pale.

"Not anything," replied the Captain. "He only wanted to say good-bye," and, turning round, he saw that Raymond Egerton had left them alone.

Going to Adelaide's side, and taking her hand gently in his, he said,—

"I am so glad you are a little better; but how cold you are! Put this rug round you until we are ready to start;" and, suiting the action to the word, he pulled the coverlet off the berth and placed it over her knees.

"Is that better, Miss Adelaide?" he asked, tenderly. "You should not feel chilly in summer, should you?"

"You are very good to me," she replied, smiling up at him, "and I feel I shall never be able to show you how grateful I am."

"I do not want any gratitude," he answered, brightly. "If I have only gained your friendship I am more than repaid for any little ser-

vice I may have shown you. Will you be my friend, Adelaide?"

"Yes, indeed I will," she replied, warmly. "How could I be anything else after all your kindness?"

"I am glad of it," he said, quietly, and then he became silent, for he was longing for the time to come when he could ask her to be his wife, yet he refrained from telling her of his love, feeling sure she did not respond to his affection, so he determined to wait and to do his utmost to make her care for him with all her heart, and not run the risk of being refused.

"Are you given to day-dreams?" asked Adelaide, laughing, seeing his transcendental mood.

"Not generally," he answered. "I fear I am a stupid companion, Miss Egerton, but I promise to be more entertaining when I get you home."

"Don't you think we shall be a great trouble to your poor old father, Captain Dalston?"

"Certainly not. My father is a dear old man, and will welcome you and Raymond as his own children. I think you will remind him of my sister, who died when she was about your age, and I want to ask you to try and take her place a little, will you?"

"Indeed I will do anything I can," replied Adelaide, gently. "I shall be only too glad if he will let me."

Just at that moment Raymond Egerton returned, and put an end to further conversation.

That night found them the most welcome guests of Mr. Dalston, who, rejoicing over the safe return of his son, was only too pleased to receive his guests also, and it was quite late before they retired to rest.

However, the next morning found them all fairly well, and after breakfast Adelaide devoted herself to her kindly host; with her sweet, winning manner and gentle ways she crept into his heart at once.

"Raymond," said Captain Dalston, as they were sauntering along the beautiful grounds together, "I wonder why that fellow Morley is so dead against you. He will do you mischief if he can."

"I know he will, but I don't think Captain Beasley will allow him. He told me he would do his best to stop him before we parted, and I think Morley will be careful about keeping in with the Captain on account of future favours, and the loss of Beasley's friendship would do him a good deal of harm."

"Of course it would, but I fail to understand what he should want to split upon you for."

"Well I think I see the reason, old fellow. The fact is, he let out the other day he is a cousin of Maurice Henley. I learnt that from Captain Beasley yesterday, and I should not be surprised if he knows more of the affair than he pretends to, for now I remember meeting him on the very evening of the robbery; he was walking in the garden, apparently coming away from the house, but as it was no business of mine I did not inquire about him."

"Depend upon it, Ray," answered Captain Dalston, "that young man is more deeply involved than either you or I imagine. Well, all we have to do is to wait. I feel a crisis is near at hand."

"I hope not, for Adelaide's sake," replied Raymond Egerton, with feeling. "What would become of her if I were taken up again?"

"Do not fear for her, Ray; she is more than welcome where she is. We should never grow tired of her, I assure you."

There was something so earnest in the Captain's voice that Raymond looked at him keenly, and the man's face told its own tale; there was no need to question his meaning.

"Dalston," said Raymond Egerton, quietly, "I said once I could not tell my sister's secrets, but I think it is better, perhaps, that you should know them; only do not refer to

what I am about to entrust you with in her presence. Will you give me your promise?"

"I will," answered Captain Dalston, firmly, "but if you think Miss Egerton would not like me to know, I would rather you did not confide in me."

"I consider it better to do so, Dalston, for it may guide you a little in the future. I want you to promise me, if I am ever imprisoned again, to let Sir Reginald Erskine know the whole story of my escape from Portland, and subsequent flight with Adelaide abroad. Will you do so out of friendship for us both?"

"Certainly I will, Raymond, but what has Sir Reginald Erskine to do with our present conversation? I thought you were going to tell me your sister's secret."

"So I am, Dalston; it is all coming out in time."

"Well, suppose you finish one story first," answered the Captain, somewhat impatiently, "for I don't suppose that 'old buster' has any thing to do with Adelaide's history."

"Unfortunately, everything!" replied Raymond Egerton, quietly.

"How?"

"Because the old buster, as you call him, is no other than Adelaide's husband!"

Captain Dalston became very pale, but he did not lose his self-possession, and turning to Raymond promised he would let Sir Reginald know, should it be necessary.

"Did she leave him for your sake, Egerton?" he asked, gravely. "Let me hear all about it; I should be glad to know."

And Raymond told him the whole affair, from the day she met him on the beach up till the time she left her home.

"Poor girl," said Captain Dalston, "how she must have suffered, especially as you say she loves him so much. She has, indeed, a noble character, and I hope she may be happy yet. Now, old fellow, if you will excuse me, I will go in, as I have some letters to write," and with parting wave he left his companion's side.

"How splendidly he bore it!" thought Raymond Egerton, as he watched his retreating figure. "I had no idea until this morning that he cared for her, but I fear there is no doubt of it; those sort of secrets need not be told in words."

Whether Captain Dalston's correspondence was of importance or no, he never put pen to paper that morning, but he sat with bent head, making up his mind to bear his disappointment bravely.

"Adelaide! Adelaide!" he moaned, "I did not realise until to-day how greatly I loved you, and I find I must forget that such love has ever been. Oh! my darling, how bitter it is to know you can never be aught to me now; but I thank Heaven I did not tell you. Poor child! you have sorrow enough of your own without sharing mine too. Yes, it is better so; perhaps you would never have been very fond of me. I trust you will be very happy some day, and I—I shall live my life for ever alone!"

CHAPTER VII.

MAURICE HENLEY'S CONFESSION.

CAPTAIN BEASLEY was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet, and two days after he arrived in England he travelled down to Kent to have an interview with Maurice Henley.

On arriving at his residence, however, he thought all must be away from home, for the windows seemed closed and every blind was drawn, but the barking of a dog told him someone must still be in the house, and after ascending the broad, white steps, he loudly rang the bell.

The door was quickly opened by a very imposing looking butler, who, on being asked if Mr. Henley were at home, replied, very gravely, "that his master had died the day before."

"Dear me! I am awfully sorry to hear that," replied Captain Beasley, with such evident regret that the butler thought it was born of sorrow for the dead man, and asked him in.

"Do come in, sir?" he repeated, seeing Captain Beasley hesitate. "I assure you Mrs. Henley would wish you to do so," and without another word he led the way through a magnificent hall to the spacious, well-furnished drawing room beyond.

A few minutes later Mrs. Henley entered the apartment; she knew Captain Beasley well, and welcomed him warmly.

"It is very good of you to let me see you at all," he began. "I fear I should not have disturbed you in your time of trouble, and if you like I will go away and call on you again later on."

"Oh, no!" she replied, "do not go. I am glad to have someone to talk to, it is so dull here alone. I fear you wanted to see my poor husband," she continued, "but you are too late. Was it about anything important, Captain Beasley, or only to give him a friendly call?"

"I am more than sorry not to have seen Mr. Henley before he passed away," answered the Captain, "for I wanted him to help me unravel a mystery, and I am afraid now the truth will never be known."

"Do tell me instead," replied the young widow. "I may be able to help you, Captain Beasley, for I know most of Maurice's secrets."

"Do you?" said her companion, with a smile, "then either you must be a very skillful woman, Mrs. Henley, or your husband must have been an intensely clever man to let you think so; but in this case, perhaps, you might have heard a little, for I believe you were rather interested once in a young fellow named Raymond Egerton, and it was on his behalf I called this morning."

"Raymond Egerton," she repeated, growing very pale. "Oh! Captain Beasley, if you have any idea where he is I entreat you to tell me. Poor fellow!" she continued, with agitation, "he has indeed been cruelly wronged!"

"I thought so," he answered, quietly, "but it is not too late to make some amends even now; so if you know he has been wronged, do not delay clearing his name for a day longer than you can help."

"You are right," she said, in a trembling voice, "and I am only waiting until my husband is buried to make his confession known to all the world. I promised him I would do so."

"His confession!" repeated the Captain, excitedly. "He did confess, then? I am indeed thankful!"

"Yes, Captain Beasley," replied the young widow, "he wrote the whole story of his guilt before he died, and asked me to have it published in all the papers. He had greatly sinned, but he was more than sorry, and his last words were of Raymond, praying for his forgiveness. Punishment always follows crime, and I am sure Maurice was fully punished for his, for I think he has had a miserable life ever since that poor fellow was condemned. He always looked wretched, even in his best days, and when he heard Raymond Egerton had escaped from Portland he grew so nervous and restless that he quite wore himself out. He had a very delicate heart, and he could not stand the constant anxiety and anguish of mind, and died from sheer exhaustion at last; but I am glad it is so, since it has cleared poor Raymond's name. And now, Captain Beasley, would you tell me how you first found our friend, and where he is at the present time?"

"Certainly, I will do both," he replied, and then he told her the story from the beginning to the end.

"I am so thankful!" she said, with tears in her eyes. "And will you go down to him to-day and tell him who it was who wronged

him, and ask him if he can forgive Maurice now that he is dead?"

"I am sure he can, Mrs. Henley," answered Captain Beasley, gravely, "because he always thought it was your late husband, who had laid the plot to ruin him, and he told me he forgave him fully, as he really did it for your sake."

"Oh! I do not say that!" she pleaded, "or I shall never be happy again, for it makes me feel I am a partner in Mr. Henley's guilt, and I really never heard the truth until last week. I know I treated Raymond very cruelly, but no one can tell how miserable I have been, and I suppose I always shall be now!" she added, sadly. "I only wish that I could die!" and then she cried as if her heart would break.

"Come, Mrs. Henley," said the Captain, in a fatherly manner, a smile passing over his mobile mouth, for he had really said what he did to find out whether Raymond Egerton had any chance of being happy after all, "you must not wish to die, you know, for you have a long life to look forward to, and I have no doubt many pleasant things will turn up for you. You are rather overdone at the present time, but you will get over it by-and-by; and now I want you to tell me why you looked so distressed when I told you Robert Morley had recognised our young friend. Did he know anything about your husband's guilt?"

"Oh, Captain Beasley," she said, "Maurice asked me not to bring Mr. Morley's name into the story, as it would only ruin him, and do Raymond no good. Need I tell you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Henley; I certainly think you ought to divulge everything you know. If Mr. Morley had anything to do with that disgraceful affair he should be branded before the world; and I, for one, would not spare him!"

"But Maurice has taken all the blame upon himself," she continued, "so Raymond's name would be cleared just the same; but I will tell you all I know, and you must act as you think best."

Then she told him that her husband had confided to his cousin Robert that he wished in some way to injure Raymond Egerton, and get him turned out of the bank.

Robert Morley had thought of the plot, and afterwards secretly helped Maurice to carry it out, and ever since he had kept Maurice on thorns by threatening to expose him if he did not buy his silence.

"Maurice confessed to me," she said, "that he has paid him many thousands to keep quiet and not betray his secret, and I expect he intended to make a good harvest out of my poor husband now that he really has found Raymond."

"Perhaps so," replied the Captain, gravely, "but he has come to the end of his tether at last; and now, Mrs. Henley, have you anything more to tell me?"

"Nothing," she replied. "You know all that I do. I will show you his confession if you like," and she fetched him the paper, duly signed and witnessed. "Next Monday it will be made public to the world unless Mr. Egerton would prefer my publishing it at once; if so I must of course obey him."

"No, I will answer for him, Mrs. Henley. I am sure he would rather wait until after the funeral," and with a few kindly words he left her alone, but with a lighter heart than she had felt for some time past.

A few hours later, as Captain Dalston was walking home from the station after having been to London to see the owners of the lost *Sea Queen*, he was overtaken by Captain Beasley.

"Hallo, Dalston!" he shouted. "Don't walk quite so fast, or I shall never catch you up!"

"I beg you pardon, sir," began the younger man. "I did not notice you."

"I thought you did not," he replied. "And now listen; I will tell you some good

news. I ran down to Kent this morning, and nothing could be more satisfactory; a written confession, and everything as plain as a pikestaff!"

"You don't mean it!" said Captain Dalston, excitedly. "It is indeed awfully clever of you; but how on earth did you manage it?"

"Well, I can't say I had much to do with it," he replied, smiling, "as it was all ready for me when I arrived there."

"I hardly understand you."

"Well, I will put it plainer for you, Dalston. When I reached Henley's residence I found the poor fellow had died yesterday, and he seems to have repented, and made a clean breast of it. I read his confession myself, and it is perfectly clear from beginning to end. He also had had a magistrate to witness the signature, and after the funeral it is going to be published."

"I am indeed thankful!" answered Captain Dalston, gravely; "and I am very grateful to you for all the trouble you have taken."

"Not at all," replied Captain Beasley, smiling; "and now I suppose you have forgiven me for not allowing you to see into the affair yourself?"

"Certainly, sir; I have nothing to forgive. I only feared at one time you could not trust me."

"It was not that, Dalston; but you see you made it clearly understood that Egerton was a friend of yours, and I thought that as I was a disinterested party I had better sift the matter, for if things had gone wrong—you had not been able to prove Raymond Egerton's innocence, and he had escaped a second time—you would have found yourself in a very difficult position. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly; and I confess I should have done my best to help Egerton under any circumstances, even if the whole world had gone against him again, for I consider he is a splendid fellow."

"I like him very much too!" replied Captain Beasley, "but I would have given him up to justice if I had for a minute entertained the thought that he was guilty; and now let us shake hands, Dalston. All misunderstandings are cleared away, and we must be good friends once more."

"I am only too rejoiced it is so," replied he, with feeling, and they clasped hands warmly, then walked on in silence. "By-the-bye," said Captain Dalston, after a short time, "what about Morley? Did you hear anything of him?"

"I am sorry to say I did," replied Captain Beasley, and then he related all that Mrs. Henley had told him.

"What a scoundrel he must be! What do you intend to do in the matter?"

"I shall have to let Egerton decide that point," he answered, "as it is a private offence more than a public one; but of one thing I am determined, and that is he shall not remain in the navy any longer, for I will make it for him."

"I am glad of it," replied Captain Dalston. "I, for one, would rejoice to see him hunted down; and now will you walk in? I think we shall find the brother and sister with my father in the library."

When Raymond Egerton heard that he was once more free, and about to be cleared before the world, his joy knew no bounds, and to gentle Adelaide it was welcome news indeed.

"Oh, Ray, I am so thankful, dear!" she cried. "My poor old boy, I do hope now your sufferings are over!"

"And yours, too, my darling sister!" he replied, with feeling. "Adelaide, I shall never forget what a brave little woman you have been!" and he stooped and kissed her brow. "And now, Captain Beasley, let me thank you again for all the trouble you have taken on my behalf. Believe me, I am sincerely grateful to you for all your kindness to me and to my dear sister."

"Yes, indeed, Captain Beasley," said Adelaide, "You have our most heartfelt gratitude, but I have no words at my command at the present time wherewith to express it. I feel too happy to speak."

"Do not try," said the Captain, graciously. "I assure you, I do not wish for any thanks. I am more than repaid by seeing your brother a free and honoured man once more."

"Thank you, sir!" said Raymond, and Adelaide for answer could only give a smile of joy.

The old man, too, was perfectly delighted, and clasped their hands again and again.

Raymond and Adelaide did not forget how much they were indebted to their noble friend, Captain Dalston, and they told him earnestly how deeply they felt all his goodness to them; and he put his own sorrow on one side for a season, and warmly entered into his friends' joy.

CHAPTER VIII.

REUNITED.

WHEN Sir Reginald Erskine read in the *Times* the confession of Maurice Henley he felt intensely surprised and upset, for he was a kind, generous-hearted man, and as he thought of the years of suffering he had inflicted on Raymond Egerton a deep regret filled his mind.

His first impulse was to find the young fellow, and make what amends were in his power.

Looking at the paper again for information as to his whereabouts he saw that "Mr. Egerton is staying with Mr. Dalston, Heathdale, Guildford"; and, taking his hat, he quickly left the Grand Hotel, and a few minutes later he was whirling down to Guildford as fast as the express could carry him.

Raymond was walking in the garden, close to the lodge gates, when Sir Reginald entered, and stepping forward he greeted him in a courteous manner.

"Mr. Egerton," he began, "I cannot tell you how grieved I am that any mistake of mine should have caused you all these years of disgrace and misery. Can you ever forgive me?" he continued, with emotion, "for I feel I have blighted your life?"

"I have nothing to forgive, Sir Reginald," answered Raymond Egerton, warmly, "for if I had been the judge I should have given the same sentence; so do not think any more about it."

"You are a noble fellow, Egerton, and I hope you will shake hands with me. That's right," as Raymond clasped his without a moment's hesitation. "And now, tell me, is there anything in the world I can do to make some recompense to you for all you have gone through?"

"Yes," replied Raymond, smiling. "Make my sister happy, and I shall be more than repaid."

Sir Reginald looked at his companion in astonishment, then said,—

"I did not know you had a sister, Egerton; but if there is anything I can do to serve her I will not neglect it for your sake."

"And for her own, I expect, when you see her," said Raymond, laughing.

His lordship looked very grave; but, as he had now entered the house, he had no time to reply, for Raymond opened the door of one of the rooms, and said,—

"You will find her in there, Sir Reginald. I need not introduce you," and in another minute he found himself beside Adelaide—the wife he so dearly loved, but who had been lost to him.

She uttered one glad cry, and fell fainting in his arms.

When she recovered they had a long and earnest conversation, and she fully explained all the mystery of their misunderstanding. Sir Reginald, pressing her to his heart, begged her to forget the past, and be his own sweet wife once more; and thus the two who had

parted in anger were reunited by the bonds of love.

"Where is your wedding-ring?" he asked, gently. "I am sorry you ever took it off, darling."

"I was obliged to do so, dear," she answered, "for I wanted to go abroad as Miss L'Estrange. But it is not far off," she laughed. "I have always worn it round my neck under my dress;" and taking it from its hiding-place she handed it to him, and once again it was put on her finger, and this time it was never to be removed.

When they returned to their home Sir Reginald's first gift to Adelaide was the bracelet she had lost on the sea beach, and she said she would rather have *that* than anything else in the world.

* * * * *

Raymond Egerton received letters of congratulation from all sides, and those who had been most ready to condemn him were among the first to ask for a return of his friendship.

As for poor old Mr. and Mrs. Henley, they seemed almost broken-hearted about the whole affair, for not only had they wronged Raymond, but they had to bear the disgrace of the world knowing Maurice's dishonour, besides mourning the loss of the son they well-nigh worshipped.

Louis Henley had not told her parents-in-law about the confession until after the funeral, thinking it best to leave them to endure their sorrow quietly as long as possible; but when the poor old people heard the sad news they travelled down to Guildford the same day, to ask Raymond to forgive them for the way they had misjudged him.

Very touching it was to see them, with their bent heads and eyes filled with tears, begging the young man beside them to forget the past, make their home his once more, and be again a son to them.

And Raymond, although he greatly wished to travel abroad to recruit his health after so much care and anxiety, could not say no to his sorrow-stricken old friends; so assuring them he would never leave them while they lived, he did his best to cheer them, and they returned to their home with lighter hearts.

But the trial had been too much for them, and before the end of the year they had both entered into their rest.

When Mr. Henley's will was read, it was discovered he had left all his immense wealth to Raymond Egerton, who had kept his promise, and never left them even for a day's pleasure, and had done his utmost to comfort them both.

* * * * *

Captain Beasley had lost no time in calling Robert Morley to an account for his disgraceful conduct.

He much wished Raymond to take proceedings against him; but Mr. Morley so earnestly entreated the latter not to do so that he forgave him, on condition that he left England, and did not return to it again; so he sent in his resignation, and was only too glad to quit the country.

Not having any relations living, there were no ties to hold him back.

* * * * *

Louie Henley had constantly met Raymond Egerton during the year he had lived with the old people, and when they had passed away, and he was again his own master, with a good fortune at his command, he gladly told her of his love.

She, who had suffered so much, was once more happy in her new-found joy, which she feared at one time was lost to her for ever.

* * * * *

Captain Dalston still lives with his dear old father, and he is quite determined he will never marry, for in his opinion there is no other woman worthy to fill Adelaide Erskine's place in his heart in all the world.

NUMBER NINETY.

—o—

"To let furnished, for a term of years, at a very low rental, a large old-fashioned family residence, comprising eleven bedrooms, four reception-rooms, dressing-rooms, two staircases, complete servants' offices, ample accommodation for a gentleman's establishment, including six-stall stable, coach-house, &c.—Apply to Messrs. Black and Grindlay, 28, Cumberland Road, E.C."

The above advertisement referred to Number Ninety, and for a period extending over some years this notice appeared spasmodically in the various daily papers. Sometimes you saw it running for a week or a fortnight at a stretch, as if it were resolved to force itself into consideration by sheer persistency. Sometimes for months I looked for it in vain. Other ignorant folk might possibly fancy that the efforts of the house-agent had been crowned at last with success—that it was let, and no longer in the market.

I knew better. I knew that "Number Ninety" would never find a tenant as long as oak and ash endured. I knew that it was passed on, as a hopeless case, from house-agent to house-agent. I knew that it would never be occupied, save by rats—and, more than this, I knew the reason *why*!

I will not say in what square, street, or road "Number Ninety" may be found. I will not divulge to human being its precise and exact locality, but this I am prepared to state, that it is positively in existence, is in London, and is still empty.

* * * * *

Fifteen years ago this very coming Christmas, my friend John Hollyoak (Civil Engineer) and I were guests at a bachelor's party; partaking, in company with eight other celibates, of a very *recherché* little dinner, in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly. Conversation became very bright as the champagne circulated, and many topics were started, discussed, and dismissed.

They (I say *they* advisedly, as I myself am a man of few words) talked on an extraordinary variety of subjects. I distinctly recollect a long argument on mushrooms—mushrooms, murders, racing, cholera; from cholera we came to sudden death, from sudden death to churchyards, and from churchyards it was naturally but a step to *ghosts*.

On this last topic the arguments became fast and furious, for the company was divided into two camps. The larger "the opposition," who scoffed, and sneered, and snapped their fingers, and laughed with irritating contempt at the very name of "Bogie," was headed by John Hollyoak; the smaller party, who were dogged, angry, and prepared to back their opinions to any extent, had for their leader our host, a bald-headed man of business whom I would certainly have credited (as I mentally remarked) with more sense.

The believers in the supernatural obtained a hearing, so far as to relate one or two blood-curdling, first or second-hand experiences, which, when concluded, instead of being received with an awestruck and respectful silence, were "pooled-pooed" with shouts of laughter, and taunting suggestions that were by no means complimentary to the sense, or sobriety, of the victims of superstition. Argument and counter-argument waxed louder and hotter, and there was every prospect of a very stormy conclusion to the evening's entertainment.

John Hollyoak, who was the most vehement, the most incredulous, the most jocular, and the most derisive of the anti-ghost faction, brought matters to a climax by declaring "that nothing would give him greater pleasure than to pass a night in a haunted house—and the worse its character the better he would be pleased!"

His challenge was instantly taken up by our somewhat ruffled host, who warmly assured him that his wishes could be very easily

satisfied, and that he would be accommodated with a night's lodging in a haunted house within twenty-four hours—in fact, in a house of such a desperate reputation that even the adjoining mansions stood empty.

He then proceeded to give a brief outline of the history of Number Ninety, Blank-street. It had once been the town residence of a very well-known county family. What evil event had happened therein history did not relate.

On the death of the last owner—diabolical-looking, aged person, much resembling the typical brigand—it had passed into the hands of a kinsman resident abroad, who had no wish to return to England, and who desired his agents to let it, if they could—a most significant suggestion!

Year by year went by, and still this "highly desirable family mansion" could find no tenant, although the rent was reduced, and reduced, and again reduced, to almost zero!

The most ghastly whispers were afloat—the most terrible experiences were actually bruited on the house-tops!

No tenant would remain, even *gratis*; and for the last ten years this "handsome, desirable, town family residence" had been the abode of rats by day, and *something else* by night—so said the neighbours.

Of course, it was the very thing for John; and he snatched up the gauntlet on the spot. He scoffed at its evil repute, and solemnly promised to rehabilitate its character within a week!

It was in vain that he was solemnly "warned"—that one of his fellow-guests gravely assured him "that he would not pass a night in 'Number Ninety' for ninety thousand pounds—it would be the price of his reason."

"You value your reason at a very high figure," returned John, with an indulgent smile. "I will venture mine for *nothing*."

"Those laugh who win," put in our host, sharply. "You have not been through the wood yet, though your name is Hollyoak! I invite all present to dine with me in three days from this; and then, if our friend here has proved that he has got the better of the spirits, we will all laugh together. Is that a bargain?"

This invitation was promptly accepted by all the company; and then they fell to making practical arrangements for John's lodging for the next night.

I had no actual hand—or, more properly speaking, *tongue*—in this discussion, which carried us on until a late hour; but, nevertheless, the next night at ten o'clock—for no ghost with any self-respect would think of appearing before that time—I found myself standing as John's second on the steps of the notorious "Number Ninety;" but I was not going to remain. The hansom that brought us was to take me back to my own respectable chambers.

This ill-famed house was large, solemn-looking, and gloomy. A heavy portico frowned down on neighbouring bare-faced hall-doors.

The caretaker (an army pensioner, bravest of the brave in daylight) was prudently awaiting us outside with the key, which said key he turned in the lock, and admitted us into a large, echoing hall, black as Erebus, saying, as he did so,—

"My missus has haired the bed, and made up a good fire in the first front, sir. Your things are all laid out, and I hope you'll have a comfortable night," dubiously, to John.

"No, sir! Thank you, sir! Excuse me, I'll not come in! Good night!" and with these words still on his lips he clattered down the steps with most indecent haste, and vanished.

"And of course you will not come in, either?" said John. "It is not in the bond, and I prefer to face them alone!" and he laughed, contemptuously, a laugh that had a curious echo, it struck me at the time. A laugh, strangely repeated, with an unpleasant, mocking emphasis. "Call for me, alive or dead, at eight o'clock to-morrow morning!" he added, push-

ing me forcibly out into the porch, and closing the door with a heavy, reverberating clang that sounded half-way down the street.

I did call for him the next morning punctually as desired. Disto the army pensioner, who stared at his common-place self-possessed appearance, with an expression of respectful astonishment.

"So it was all humbug, of course," I said, as he took my arm, and we set off for our club.

"You shall have the whole story whenever we have had something to eat," he replied. "It will keep till after breakfast—I'm famishing!"

I remarked that he looked unusually grave as we chatted over our broiled fish and omelette, and that occasionally his attention seemed wandering, to say the least of it. The moment he had brought out his cigar case and lit up, he turned to me and said,—

"I see you are just quivering to know my experience, and I won't keep you on tenter hooks any longer. In four words—I have seen them!"

I am (as before hinted) a silent man. I merely looked at him with widely parted mouth, and staring interrogative eyes.

I believe I had best endeavour to give the narrative without comment, and in John Hollyoak's own way. This is, as well as I can recollect, his experience almost word for word:—

"I proceeded upstairs, after I had shut you out, lighting my way by a match, and found the front room easily, as the door was ajar, and it was lit up by a roaring and most cheerful-looking fire and two wax candles. It was a comfortable apartment, furnished with old-fashioned chairs and tables, and the traditional four-poster. There were numerous doors, which proved to be cupboards, and when I had executed a rigorous search in each of these closets, and locked them, and investigated the bed above and beneath, sounded the walls, and bolted the door, I sat down before the fire, lit a cigar, opened a book, and felt that I was going to be master of the situation, and most thoroughly and completely "at home." My novel proved absorbing. I read on greedily chapter after chapter, and so interested was I and amused—for it was a lively book—that I positively lost sight of my whereabouts, and fancied myself reading in my own chambers! There was not a sound—not even a mouse in the wainscot. The coals, dropping from the grate, alone occasionally broke the silence, till a neighbouring church clock slowly boomed twelve! 'The hour!' I said to myself, with a laugh, as I gave the fire a rousing poke, and commenced a fresh chapter; but ere I had read three pages I had occasion to stop and listen. What was that distant sound now coming nearer and nearer? 'Rats, of course!' said common-sense; 'it was just the very house for vermin!' Then a longish silence. Again a stir sounds, coming nearer as if apparently caused by many feet passing down the corridor—high-heeled shoes and sweeping silken trains! Of course it was all imagination, I assured myself, or—rats! Rats were capable of making such curious, improbable noises!

"Then another long silence. No sound, but cinders and the ticking of my watch, which I had laid on the table.

"I resumed my book, rather ashamed and a little indignant with myself for having put it down, and calmly dismissed my late interruption as 'rats—nothing but rats.'

"I had been reading and smoking for some time in a placid and highly incredulous frame of mind when I was somewhat suddenly startled by a loud single knock at my room door. I took no notice of it; but merely laid down my novel, and sat 'tight.'

"Another knock, more imperious this time. After a moment's mental deliberation I arose, armed myself with the poker, prepared to brain any number of rats, and threw the door open with a violent swing that strained its very hinges, and beheld, to my amazement, a

tall, powdered footman in a laced scarlet livery, who, making a formal inclination of his head, astounded me still further by saying,—

"Dinner is ready!"

"I'm not coming," I replied, without a moment's hesitation, and therupon I slammed the door rudely in his face, locked it, and resumed my seat, also my book; but reading was a farce—my ears were aching for the next sound.

"It soon came—rapid steps running up the stairs, and again a single knock. I went over to the door, and once more discovered the tall footman, who said, with studied courtesy,—

"Dinner is ready, and the company are waiting."

"I told you I was not coming. Be off, and be hanged to you," I cried, again shutting the door violently.

"This time I did not make even a pretence at reading. I merely sat and waited for the next move.

"I had not long to sit. In ten minutes I heard a third loud knock. I rose, went to the door, and tore it open. There, as I expected, was the servant again, with his parrot speech,—

"Dinner is ready, the company are waiting, and the master says you must come!"

"All right then, I'll come," I replied, wearied by reason of his importunity, and feeling suddenly fired with a desire to see the end of the adventure.

He accordingly led the way downstairs, and I followed him, noting as I went the gilt buttons on his coat, and his splendidly-turned calves, also that the hall and passages were now brilliantly illuminated, and that several livered servants were passing to and fro, and that from (presumably) the dining-room a buzz of tongues and loud volleys of laughter, and many hilarious voices, and a clatter of knives and forks, issued.

"I was not left much time for speculation, as in another second I found myself inside the door, and my escort announced me in a stentorian voice as 'Mr. Hollyoak.'

"I could hardly credit my senses as I looked round, and saw about two dozen people, dressed in the fashion of the last century, seated at the table, which was loaded with gold and silver plate, and lighted up by a blaze of wax candles in massive candelabras.

"An elderly gentleman, who presided at the head of the board, rose. He was dressed in a crimson coat, braided with silver. He wore a periwig, had the most piercing black eyes I ever saw, and made me the finest bow I ever received in all my life, and with a polite wave of a taper hand indicated my seat—a vacant chair between two powdered and patched beauties, with overflowing white shoulders and necks, sparkling with diamonds.

"At first I was fully convinced that the whole affair was a superbly-matured practical joke. Everything looked so real, so truly flesh and blood, so complete in every detail; but I looked round in vain for *one* familiar face.

"I saw young, old, and elderly; handsome and the reverse. On all faces there was a similar expression—reckless, hardened defiance, and something else that made me shudder, but that I could not classify.

"Were they a secret community? Fourth rate, say "coincers?" but no. In one rapid glance I noticed that they belonged exclusively to the upper stratum of society—bygone society.

"The jabber of talking had momentarily ceased, and the host imperiously hammering the table with a knife handle, said in a singularly harsh, grating voice,—

"Ladies and gentlemen,—permit me to give you a toast—our guest," looking straight at me, with his glittering coal-black eyes.

"Every glass was immediately raised. Twenty faces were turned towards mine, when, happily, a sudden impulse seized me. I sprang twenty feet and said,—

"Ladies and gentlemen,—I beg to thank you for your kind hospitality, but before I accept it allow me to say grace."

I did not wait for permission, but hurriedly repeated a Latin benediction *aloud*.

In an instant there was a violent crash, an uproar, a sound of running, of screams, groans and curses, and complete darkness.

"I found myself standing alone by a big, bare, mahogany table, which I could just dimly discern by the aid of a street lamp that threw its meagre light into the great empty dining-room from the other side of the area.

"I must confess that I felt my nerves a little shaken by this instantaneous change from light to darkness—from a crowd of gay and noisy companions to utter solitude and silence.

"I stood for a moment trying to recover my mental balance. I rubbed my eyes hard to assure myself that I was *awake*, and then I placed this very cigar case in the middle of the table, as a sign and token that I had been downstairs, where cigar case I found exactly where I left it this morning, and then went and groped my way into the hall, and regained my room.

"I met with no obstruction *en route*. I saw no one, but as I closed and double-locked my door I distinctly heard a low laugh outside the keyhole—a sort of suppressed, malicious titter, that made me very angry.

"I once more opened the door. There was nothing to be seen. I waited and listened—dead silence. I then undressed and went to bed, resolved that a whole army of footmen would fail to invite me once more to her festive board. I was determined not to lose my night's rest, ghosts or no ghosts.

"Just as I was dosing off I remember hearing the neighbouring church clock chime two. It was the last sound I was aware of; the house was now as silent as a vault. My fire burnt away cheerfully. I was no longer in the least degree inclined for reading, and I fell fast asleep, and slept soundly till I heard the cabs and milk-carts beginning their morning career.

"I then rose, dressed at my leisure, and found you, my good faithful friend, awaiting me rather anxiously, on the hall door steps.

"I have not done with that house yet. I'm determined to find out who those people are, and where they come from. I shall sleep there again to-night, and so shall 'Crib,' my bulldog; and you will see that I shall have news for you to-morrow morning, if I am alive to tell the tale," he added, with a laugh.

"In vain I would have dissuaded him. I protested, argued, implored. I declared that rashness was not courage; that he had seen enough; that I who had seen nothing, and only listened to his experiences to hand, was convinced that *Number Ninety* was a house to be avoided.

"I might just as well have talked to my umbrella. So, once more, I reluctantly accompanied him to his previous night's lodging. Once more I saw him disappear inside the gloomy, forbidding-looking, echoing hall.

I then went home in an unusually anxious, semi-excited, nervous state of mind; and I, who generally outrival the Seven Sleepers, lay wide awake, tumbling and tossing hour after hour, a prey to the most foolish ideas—ideas I would have laughed to scorn in daylight.

More than once I was positive that I heard John Hollyoak calling me; and I sat up in bed and listened.

Of course it was fancy, for the instant I did so there was no sound.

At the first gleams of winter dawn I rose, dressed, and swallowed a cup of good strong coffee to clear my brain from the misty notions it had collected during the night. And then I invested myself in my warmest topcoat and comforter, and set off for Blank-street.

Early as it was—it was but half-past seven—I found the army pensioner was before me pacing the pavement with a countenance that would have made a first-rate frontispiece for

"Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy"—a countenance the reverse of cheerful.

I was not disposed to wait for eight o'clock. I was too uneasy and too impatient for further particulars of the dinner party. So I rang with all my might, and knocked with all my main.

No sound within—no answer! But John was always a heavy sleeper! I was resolved to rouse him all the same, and knocked and rang, and rang and knocked incessantly for fully ten minutes.

I then stooped down, and applied my eye to the keyhole. I looked steadily into the aperture till I became accustomed to the darkness, and then it seemed to me that another eye—a very strange, fiery eye—was glaring into mine from the other side of the keyhole!

I removed my eye and applied my mouth instead, and shouted with all the power of my lungs (I did not care a straw if passers-by took me for an escaped lunatic)—

"John! John! Hollyoak!"

"How his name echoed and re echoed up through that great empty house he must hear that!" I said to myself, as I pressed my ear now against the lock, and listened with throbbing suspense.

The echo of "Hollyoak" had hardly died away when I swear that I distinctly heard a low, sniggering, mocking laugh—that was my only answer—that, and a vast unresponsive silence!

I was now quite desperate. I shook the door frantically with all my strength. I broke the bell; in short, my behaviour was such that it excited the curiosity of a policeman, who crossed to know "what was up?"

"I want to get in!" I panted, breathless with my exertions.

"You'd better stay where you are!" said Bobby; "the outside of this house is the best of it! There are terrible stories!"

"But there is a gentleman inside it!" I interrupted, impatiently. "He slept there last night, and I can't wake him! He has the key!"

"Oh, you can't wake him!" returned the policeman, gravely. "Then we must get a locksmith!"

But already the thoughtful pensioner had procured one; and already a considerable and curious crowd surrounded the steps.

After five minutes of (to me) maddening delay, the great heavy door was opened, and swung slowly back and I instantly rushed in, followed less precipitately by the policeman and pensioner.

I had not far to seek John Hollyoak! He and his dog were lying at the foot of the stairs, both stone dead!

[THE END.]

CAN YOU ACCOUNT FOR IT.

—o—

I AM an old maid, and am not the least ashamed of the circumstance. Pray, why should women not be allowed the benefit of the doubt like men, and be supposed to remain single from choice?

I can assure you that it is not from want of offers that I am Miss Janet Mac Tavish spinster. I could tell—but no matter. It is not to set down a list of proposals that I have taken pen in hand, but to relate a very mysterious occurrence that happened in our house last spring.

My sister Matilda and I are a well-to-do couple of maiden ladies, having no poor relatives, and a comfortable private fortune. We keep four servants (all female), and occupy a

large detached house in a fashionable part of Edinburgh, and the circle in which we move is most exclusive and genteel.

Matilda is a good deal older than I am (though we dress alike), and is somewhat of an invalid.

Our east winds are certainly trying, and last March she had a very sharp attack of bronchitis, brought on (between ourselves) by her own rash imprudence. Though I dared not say this to her face I may say it here.

She does not approve of fiction, though goodness knows what I am going to set down is not fiction, but fact; but any literary work in a gay paper cover (of course, I don't mean tracts), such as novels and magazines, is an abomination in her eyes, and "reading such like trash" she considers sinful waste of time.

So, even if this falls into her hands by an odd chance she will never read it, and I am quite safe in writing out everything that happened, as I dared not do if I thought that Matilda was coming after me, and picking holes in every sentence.

Matilda is terribly particular about grammar and orthography, and reads over all my letters before I venture to close them.

Dear me, how I have wandered away from point! I'm sure no one will care to know that I am a little in awe of my elder—that she treats me sometimes as if I were still in my teens. But people may like to hear of the queer thing that happened to me, and I am really and truly coming to it at last.

Matilda was ill with bronchitis—very ill. Bella (that's our sewing maid and general factotum, who has been with us twelve years this term) and I took it in turns to sit up with her at night.

It happened to be my night, and I was sitting over the fire in a half-kind of doze, when Matilda woke up, and nothing would serve her but a cup of tea of all things, at two o'clock in the morning—the kitchen fire out, no hot water, and every one in the house in their beds except myself.

I had some nice beef-tea in a little pan beside the hob, and I coaxed her hard to try some of that, but not a bit of it. Nothing would serve her but real tea, and I knew that once she had taken the notion in her head I might just as well do her bidding first as last. So I opened the door and went out, thinking to take the small lamp (for, of course, all the gas was out, and turned off at the metre, as it ought to be in every decent house).

"You'll no do that!" she said, quite cross. Matilda speaks broad when she is vexed, and we had had a bit of argument about the tea.

"You'll no do that, and leave me here without the light! Just go down, and make me a cup of tea as quick as ever you can, for I knew I'll be awfully the better of it!"

So, there was just nothing else for it, and down I went in the pitch-black darkness, not liking the job at all.

It was not that I was afraid. Not I. But the notion of having to wake-up and make the kitchen fire, and boil the kettle, was an errand that went rather against the grain, especially as I'm an awful bad hand at lighting a fire.

I was thinking of this, and wondering where were the wood and the matches to be found, when, just as I reached the head of the stairs, I was delighted to hear a great raking-out of cinders below in the kitchen. Such a raking and poking, and banging of coals, and knocking about of the range I never did hear, and I said to myself,—

"This is fine; it's washing morning" (we do our washing at home), "and later than I thought; and the servants are up, so it's all right," and I ran down the kitchen stairs, quite inspirited-like by the idea.

As I passed the door of the servants' room, (where cook and housemaid slept) Harris—

"Who's that?"

I went to the door, and said,—

"It's I—Miss Janet. I want a cup of tea for Miss MacTavish."

In a moment Harris had thrown on some clothes, and was out in the passage. She was always a quick, willing girl, and very obliging. She said it was black dark, and I could not see her.

"Never you mind, Miss Janet; I'll light the fire, and boil up the kettle in no time."

"You need not do that," said I, "for there's someone at the fire already—cook, I suppose."

"Not me, mam!" said a sleepy voice from the interior of the bedroom. "I'm in my bed."

"Then who can it be?" I asked, for the poking and raking had become still more tremendous, and the thunders of the poker was just awful!

"It must be Bella," said Harris, feeling her way to the kitchen door, and pushing it open, followed by me.

We stood for full half-a-minute in the dark, whilst she felt about and groped for the matches, and still the noise continued.

"Bella," I said, crossly, "what on earth—"

But at this instant the match was struck, and dimly lit up the kitchen.

I strained my eyes into the darkness, whilst Harris composedly lit a candle. I looked, and looked again; but there was no one in the kitchen but ourselves.

I was just petrified, I can tell you, and I staggered against the dresser, and gaped at the now silent fireplace. The coals, and cinders, and ashes were exactly as they had gone out, not a bit disturbed; any one could see that they had never been stirred.

"In the name of goodness, Harris," I said, in a whisper, "where is the person that was poking that fire? You heard them yourself!"

"I heard a noise, sure enough, Miss Janet," she said, not a bit daunted; "and if I was a body that believed in ghosts and such like leavers I'd say it was them," putting firewood in the grate as she spoke. "It's queer, certainly! Miss MacTavish will be wearying for her tea," she added. "I know well what it is to have a kind of longing for a good cup. Save us! what a cold air there is in this kitchen? I wonder where cook put the bellows!"

Seeing that Harris was taking the matter so coolly, for very shame sake I was forced to do the like; so I did not say a word about my misgivings, nor the odd, queer thrill I had felt as we stood in the pitch darkness, and listened to the furious raking of the kitchen grate.

How icy cold the kitchen had been! Just like a vault, and with the same damp, earthy smell!

I was in a mighty hurry to get back upstairs, believe me, and did all in my power to speed the fire and the kettle, and in due time we wended our way upstairs, Harris bearing the tea in a tray, and walking last.

I left her to administer the refreshment whilst I went into Bella's room, which was close by, candle in hand.

"You are awake, I see, Bella," I remarked, putting it down as I spoke (I felt that I must unbosom myself to someone, or never close an eye that night). "Tell me, did you hear a great raking of the kitchen fire just now?"

"Yes, miss, of course! Why, it woke me! I suppose you had occasion to go down for something, Miss Janet; but why did you not call me?"

"It was not I who woke you, Bella!" I rejoined, quietly. "I was on my way downstairs when I heard of that noise below, and I thought it was cook or Harris; but when I got down Harris came out of the bed-room. Cook was in bed. Maggie, you know, is up above you, and we went into the kitchen thinking it might be you or her and lit a candle; but I give you my word of honour that, although the noise was really terrible till we struck a light, when we looked about us not a soul was to be seen!"

At this Bella started up in bed, and became of a livid, chalky kind of colour.

"No one, Miss Janet?" she gasped out.

"Not a soul!" I replied, solemnly.

"Then oh!" she exclaimed, now jumping bodily out on the door, and looking quite wild, and distracted. "Tell me, in Heaven's name, which of you—who went into the kitchen first, you or Harris?"

She was so agitated she seemed scarcely able to bring out the words, and her eyes rested upon mine with a strange, frightened look that made me fancy she had taken temporary leave of her wits.

"Harris went first!" I answered, shortly.

"Thank Heaven for that!" she returned, now collapsing on the edge of her bed. "But poor Kate Harris is a dead woman!"

I stared hard at Bella—as well I might. Was she talking in her sleep? or was I dreaming?

"What do you mean, Bella Cameron?" I cried, "are you gone crazy?—are you gone clean daft?"

"It was a warning," she replied, in a low and awestruck voice. "We Highlanders understand the like well! It was a warning of death! Kate Harris's hour has come!"

"If you are going to talk such wicked nonsense, Bella," I said, "I'm not going to stop to listen. Whatever you do don't let Matilda hear you going on with such foolishness. The house would not hold her—and you know that well!"

"All right, Miss Janet; you heard the fire yourself, you will allow that; and you will see that the kitchen grate is never raked out for nothing. I only wish, from the bottom of my heart, that what I've told you may not come true; but, bad as it was, I'm thankful that you were not first in the kitchen!"

A few more indignant expostulations on my part and lamentations on Bella's, and then I went back to Matilda; and it being now near three o'clock, and she inclined to be drowsy, I lay down on the sofa and got a couple of hours' sleep.

A day or two afterwards I was suddenly struck with a strange thrill of apprehension by noticing how very, very ill Kate Harris looked. I taxed her with not feeling well, and she admitted that she had not been herself, and could not say what ailed her.

She had no actual pain, but she felt weak all over, and could scarcely drag herself about the house.

"It would go off. She would not see a doctor—no, no, no! It was only just a kind of cold feeling in her bones, and a sort of notion that a hand was gripping her throat. It was all fancy; and Dr. Henderson (our doctor) would make fine game of her if he saw her by way of being a patient. She would be all right in a day or two."

Vain hope! In a day or two she was much worse. She was obliged to give in to take her bed. I sent for Dr. Henderson—indeed, he called daily to see Matty—so I had only to pilot him down below to see Kate. He came out to me presently with a very grave face, and said,—

"Has she any friends?" pointing towards Kate's door with his thumb.

"Friends! To be sure," I answered. "She has a sister married to a tram conductor in Wickham street."

"Send for her at once; and you had better have her moved. She can't last a week."

"Do you mean that she is going to die?" I gasped, clutching the banisters, for we were standing in the lower hall.

"I am sorry to say the case is hopeless. Nothing can save her, and the sooner she is with her own people the better."

I was, I need scarcely tell you, greatly shocked—terribly shocked—and presently, when I had recovered myself, I sent off, post haste, for Kate's sister.

I went in to see her. She, poor creature, was all curiosity to hear what the doctor had said.

"He would tell me nothing, miss," she observed, smilingly, "only felt my pulse and

tried my heart with a stethoscope, and my temperature with that queer little tube. I only feel a bit tired and out of breath; but you'll find I'll be all right in a day or two. I'm only sorry I'm giving all this trouble, and Bella and Mary having to do my work. However, I'll be fit to clean the plate on Saturday."

Poor soul, little did she dream that her work in this world was done!

And I, as I sat beside the bed, and looked at her always pale face, her now livid lips and hollow eyes, told myself that already I could see the hand of death on her countenance,

I was obliged to tell her sister what the doctor had said; and how she cried—and so did I—and who was to tell Kate?

We wished to keep her with us undisturbed—Matilda and I—but her people would not hear of it, and we had an ambulance from the hospital, and sent her home.

She just lived a week, and, strange to say, she had always the greatest craving for me to be with her, for me to sit beside her, read to her, and hold her hand. She showed far more anxiety for my company than for that of any of her own people.

Bella alone, of all the household, expressed no astonishment when she heard the doctor's startling verdict, being in Mattie's room at the time. She merely looked over at me gravely, and significantly shook her head.

The night Kate and I were with her she had lain silent for a long time, and then she said to me quite suddenly,—

"Miss Janet, you'll remember the morning you came downstairs looking for Miss MacTavish's tea?" (Did I not recollect it, only too well!) "Somehow, I got a queer kind of chill then; I felt it at the time, to the very marrow of my bones. I have never been warm since. It was just this day fortnight. I remember it well, because it was washing Monday."

That night Kate Harris died. She passed away, as it were, in her sleep, with her hand in mine. As she was with me on that mysterious night so I was now with her.

Call me a superstitious old imbecile, or what you like, but I firmly believe that, had I entered that room first, it would have been Janet MacTavish, and not Kate Harris, who was lying in her coffin!

Of course Matilda knows nothing of this, nor ever will, perhaps, for she is one of your strong-minded folk. She would scold at the idea, and at me, for a daft, silly body, and explain it all away quite reasonable like. I only wish she could!

[THE END.]

FACETIA.

"THERE is a very baleful business going on in the South now," remarked De Wiggs. "What is it?" asked Le Diggs. "Packing cotton."

"What's the matter, Uncle Rastus?" he asked, facetiously, as the old man came limping in: "got the gout?" "No, sir, I've got de bill to' dat whitewashin' what I did fo' yer las' year."

Two ladies meet who have been pupils at the same boarding-school. The one (proudly): "My dear, I've been married three years." The other (still more proudly): "Why, that's nothing; I'm already divorced!"

A sign in the rooms of a hotel reads as follows:—"Indian clubs and dumb-bells will not be permitted in any of the rooms. Guests in need of exercise can go down to the kitchen and pound a steak."

"I SEE," said Stubbs, "that Doctor Michael Foster tells the British Association that smoking tobacco produces defective vision. Do you believe it?" "Oh, I am sure of it," replied Mrs. S.; "for I saw your friend Butts last evening puffing away, quite unconscious that there were several ladies in the room."

"WAS that your wife I heard talking just now?" "I think not. She's closed for repairs." "What d'ye mean?" "She has gone to the dentist's."

DOUBTFUL-LOOKING GUEST: "Landlord, have you a fire-escape in this hotel?" Experienced landlord: "Yes, sir, but we generally keep the bull-dog chained at the bottom of it."

"I WALKED the floor all night with the toothache," said he. To which the unfeeling listener replied: "You didn't expect to walk the ceiling with it, did you?"

TRAMP: "Please help me; I am a Charles-ton sufferer." Old Gentleman: "Ah, indeed! A sufferer by that awful earthquake? What did you lose?" Tramp: "I lost a bet how many shocks there was."

WIFE: "James, the servant-girl tells me you often chuck her under the chin, and give her a shilling. Do you think that's right?" Husband: "What would you have me do—give her half-a-crown?"

SPRIGGS: "How much older is your sister than you, Johnny?" Johnny: "I dunno. Maud useter be twenty-five years, then she was twenty, and now she ain't only eighteen. I expect we'll soon be twins."

"Do you find a sufficiency of caloric in the circunmambient atmosphere?" asked the high-school girl of her mother at the tea-table.

"Well, I don't care if you do put a little more sugar in my cup, Mildred," replied the old lady.

"Did you pass the civil-service examination?" "I don't know yet, but I got the right answers to some questions." "Which ones were those?" "I answered all right when they asked me what my name was, and what parish I was born in."

"I REGRET to say zat Mademoiselle Fayette eez a little horse zis evening," explained a French manager to an English-speaking audience, who had assembled to hear a prima donna sing. "Trot her out, then, if she's a little horse!" bellowed an urchin, whose feet hung over the gallery-railing.

"Is anyone waiting on you?" enquired the polite shopman of a West-end maiden. "Well, I can hardly tell," she blushingly replied. "Sometimes I think there is, and then again I ain't certain; but Will's so sort of funny, you know." And then she blushed again, and asked to look at some lace collars.

"I SAY, Jobkins, can you let me have that half-crown you owe me?" "Want it to-day, particularly?" "Well, you see, I have the toothache." "What has that to do with it?" "A great shock will cure the toothache, Jobkins, and I thought perhaps if you paid me, I—er—Thank you!"

"I UNDERSTAND that young Spriggins, who went to Texas last May, died with his boots on." "It's a miserable slander, sir!" "Well, the papers say so, anyhow." "Well, the papers lie. Young Jackson, who was with him at the time, says he had on a pair of boots that belonged to another man. Let us be just to the dead."

PHYSICIAN: "I am afraid, Mrs. Quickmoney, that there is some trouble with your bronchial organ." Mrs. Quickmoney (alarmed): "Bronchial organ?" Physician: "Yes." Mrs. Quickmoney: "Why I never heard it called that before; but I am sure if you heard my daughter play on it, you would be convinced that it is all right."

"I SEE," said Mr. Gruff, drawing a long but almost invisible something from the plate of butter—"I see that the microscopist of the agricultural department is photographing butter and butterine, so that he can tell them apart." "Is he?" asked Mrs. Saven, the landlady. "Yes, he is. And it occurs to me, Mrs. Saven, that it might be well to take your butter upstairs and comb its hair up nice and smooth, so that it will appear presentable if he should come here to take its—Mr. Gruff is living at a hotel now."

SOCIETY.

HER MAJESTY, it is stated, will remain at Windsor for at least six weeks, and is prepared to stay yet longer if any need arises, although she is desirous of finding herself settled in the Isle of Wight as soon after the dawn of the New Year as possible. The movements of the Court are now subject for a short time to the wishes and health of Princess Beatrice, and the duration of the sojourn at Osborne will depend entirely upon her, and perhaps, a certain other smaller, but more exacting, individual.

HER MAJESTY formally received at Windsor Castle the gift which has been sent her by the Sultan of Muscat. This very handsome present, which originally consisted of six superb Arab horses, was conveyed by sea *via* the Suez Canal, Malta, and Gibraltar. One of the chargers unfortunately was lost during rough weather in the Bay of Biscay before the stud reached this country. The five horses—four bays and a chestnut—under the charge of grooms, who wore turbans and native costumes, arrived by Great Western train at Windsor, and were stabled till the Queen could see them, the attendants while awaiting the Royal commands being regaled at the Palace.

At three o'clock the horses were led into the grand quadrangle, and ranged at the eastern end of the square, in which Major-General Sir John Cowell, Lord Bridport, Major-General du Plat, Col. Maude and other members of her Majesty's household had assembled.

The Queen, who was accompanied by Princess Louise (Marchioness of Lorne) and Princess Henry of Battenberg, drove from the archway under the Oak Room shortly afterwards, the Royal ladies occupying an open landau drawn by a couple of white horses and preceded by an outrider. Pausing a few yards from the entrance the Queen and Princesses were joined by Prince Henry of Battenberg and the Marquis of Lorne, who had just returned from shooting on the Norfolk Farm.

General Sir H. F. Ponsonby, who was in attendance upon the Queen, then introduced the chief Arab official to her Majesty and the Princesses, to whom the chargers were exhibited, each animal, after its clothing had been removed, being taken to the side of the Royal equipage. The Queen and Princesses, after seeing the horses, drove from the quadrangle.

One of the Queen of Italy's large orders for Parisian dresses, says *Modern Society*, is upon the point of completion. Two superb toilettes merit special description. One is ball-dress of satin, in the new brilliant pale green, known as apple-green. The long train is bordered all round with a narrow ruffle of the satin, above which is set a garland of oak leaves. The skirt front is embroidered in a pattern of double rings in beads of alternate crystal and pearls. It is raised in front so as to show a plaiting of cream satin, adorned with a similar embroidery, and parts at the right side so as to show a plaited panel of the embroidered cream satin. The corsage is crossed transversely with a garland of oak leaves intermixed with pendants of diamonds. The other dress is a dinner toilette, with corsage and train in pale mauve satin, brocaded with large single roses in gold and silver. The skirt front is in plain satin, of the same hue, and is finished with a flounce, sloping upwards to a point in the centre, and adorned with fine embroidery of gold and silver. The corsage is cut square in front, with pointed revers in plain satin, embroidered like the flounces. Deep sleeve caps to correspond are set over long loose sleeves of white tulle, spangled with silver.

On November 11 was solemnised at St. Paul's Church, Knightsbridge, the marriage of Mr. Charles James Phillips, eldest son of Mr. Charles Phillips, of Mortlake, and Miss Annie Leyborne Popham, younger daughter of the late Mr. Alexander Leyborne Popham.

STATISTICS.

THERE are now more than two thousand species and varieties of woody plants in the botanical garden known as the Arnold Arboretum, which belongs to Harvard University. It is richer in species than any other collection of living plants in the United States.

THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY AT THE COLONIAL EXHIBITION.—It may be remembered that space for a kiosk, in which versions of the Holy Scriptures in 134 languages and dialects spoken in the British Empire were displayed, was granted in the South Africa section of the Queen's Gate Annex, at the "Colinderyes," and the shop No. 14 in Old London-street was placed at the service of the society for the sale of the Scriptures. The results have been most satisfactory in respect to the number of copies purchased. At the Health Exhibition these sales were prohibited, but at the Fisheries 3,111 Bibles, 5,397 Testaments, and 2,708 portions were sold, together with 438 Gospels, &c., in many tongues. The total of all publications during that year was 11,654, and the receipts £600 14s. 4d. At the Inventions Exhibition the receipts were £206 6s. 8d., and the total of sales 15,540, made up of 844 Bibles, 11,746 Testaments, 1,388 portions, and 1,562 publications in foreign languages. At the Colonial Exhibition the total was 31,687, and the amount realised was £462 7s. 2d. The total was made up of 2,799 Bibles, 23,310 Testaments, 1,402 portions, and 4,156 foreign. The discrepancies in the money totals is accounted for by the fact that the penny Testament was sold at half its cost.

GEMS.

THE love of all things springs from the love of one.

PERSISTENT INDUSTRY is the best antidote for temptation.

You needn't pack up any worries. You can get them anywhere as you go along.

Be assured that no good can come of your work, but as it arises simply out of your own true natures and the necessities of the times around you.

THE sick in mind, and perhaps in body, are rendered more darkly and hopelessly so, by the manifold reflection of their disease mirrored in the deportment of those about them.

OUR admiration of a famous man lessens on our nearer acquaintance with him; and we seldom hear of a celebrated person without a catalogue of some notorious weaknesses and infirmities.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CHAPPED HANDS.—A good mixture for chapped hands is composed of carbolic acid, fifteen grains; the yolk of one egg; glycerine, three drachms. A little of this is to be rubbed into the hands several times a day if the skin is not broken.

PLAIN FRENCH DRESSING.—A plain French dressing is made of salt, pepper, oil, and vinegar, and nothing else. Three tablespoonfuls of oil to one of vinegar, salt-spoonful heapings full of salt, and even salt-spoonful of pepper mixed with a little cayenne.

SCALLOPED CABBAGE.—Strip the loose leaves from a cabbage, cut it in quarters almost through the core, and steam until tender. When nearly done, lift the cabbage into an earthen baking-dish of suitable size, cut it fine, pour on the top a dish of milk, with salt to taste. Sprinkle over the top fine bread or cracker crumbs. Bake an hour; the top should have a brown crust, but the inside should be creamy. This has proved to be a very nice way of cooking cabbage.

MISCELLANEOUS.

MILK AS AN ODOUR ABSORBENT.—Those dairy-men who do not believe in the power of milk to rapidly absorb and become contaminated by surrounding noxious smells will do well to try the following simple test, the results of which will, doubtless, immediately convince the most sceptical: Take a wide bowl or soup plate to the cow stable when you go to milk; pour into it a pint of fresh milk, set it on the floor or at the height of a milk stool, so as to expose it fully to the air of the stable, behind and close to the cows. If the day is close and heavy and the milk is cold, and the stable not cleaned out and aired, the result will be surprising. Take it to the house or anywhere away from the stable, and try to drink it.

FORMATION OF AN ICEBERG.—The birth of a huge iceberg, a phenomenon that has been seen only once or twice by a European, and to a certain extent has remained a theory, was observed by the Danish explorers on the East coast of Greenland, last summer. The bergs are formed by breaking off from the end of glaciers extending from the perpetual ice of the unexplored interior to the coast into the sea. The water buoys up the sea end of the glacier until it breaks, by its own weight, with a noise that sounds like loud thunder miles away. The commotion of the water, as the iceberg turns over and over in the effort to attain its balance, is felt to a great distance along the coast. The natives regard it as the work of evil spirits, and believe that to look upon the glacier in its throes is death. The Danish officers when observing the breaking off of the end of the great glacier *Puissortok* through their telescopes, were roughly ordered by their Esquimaux escort, usually submissive enough, to follow their example and turn their backs on the interesting scene. They had happily completed their observations, and avoided an embarrassing conflict with their crew by a seeming compliance with the order.

FRENCH METHOD OF POLISHING WOOD.—The method of polishing wood with charcoal, now much employed by French cabinet-makers, is thus described in a Paris technical journal: all the world now knows of those articles of furniture of a dead black colour, with sharp and clear-cut edges and a smooth surface, the wood of which seems to be of the density of ebony. Viewing them side by side with furniture rendered black by paint and varnish, the difference is so sensible that the considerable margin of price separating the two kinds explains itself. The operations are much longer and much more minute in this mode of charcoal polishing, which respects every detail of carving, while paint and varnish would clog up the holes and widen the ridges. In the first process they employ only carefully selected woods, of a close and compact grain; they cover them with a coat of camphor dissolved in water and almost immediately after with another coat composed chiefly of sulphate of iron and nutgall. The two compositions, in blending, penetrate the wood and give it an indelible tinge, at the same time rendering it impervious to the attacks of insects. When these two coats are sufficiently dry, they rub the surface of the wood at first with a very hard brush of couch grass (chienement), and then with charcoal of substance as light and friable as possible; because if a single hard grain remained in the charcoal, this alone would scratch the surface which they wish, on the contrary, to render perfectly smooth. The flat parts are rubbed with natural stick charcoal; the indented portions and crevices with charcoal powder. Alternately with the charcoal the workman also rubs his piece of furniture with flannel soaked in linseed oil and essence of turpentine. These poucings, repeated several times, cause the charcoal powder and the oil to penetrate into the wood, giving the article of furniture a beautiful colour and also a perfect polish, which has none of the flaws of ordinary varnish.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

L. E. F.—As quoted we cannot enlighten you.
PAT.—Unmarried.

ROSE.—He is the oldest.

JAMES W.—Eldest is usually employed, as, for example, the *eldest son*.

G. COTTON.—Your handwriting is very neat and pretty.

GREEN GRAPES.—Certainly, if he works hard, and has the ability.

H. E. R.—Apply to the Secretary, "Corps of Commissioners," Strand.

W. M.—We know of nothing that will lighten the hair without injury to it.

ROSE DROPS.—Pare the corns, if hard, and apply lichen caustic; if soft try glacial acetic acid, applied carefully with a camel's hair-brush.

BROWN EYED NELL.—1. Pretty brown hair. 2. Moderate writing. 3. N. 3; quite correct. 4. Doubtless they would be admired.

LITTLE CONNIE.—1. At a dentist's. 2. Certainly not. 3. Very good writing. 4. Rather strong-minded, and fond of having your own way.

E. F. H.—You must apply to the Court to appoint a new trustee. Any respectable solicitor will manage the business for you.

M. N.—Cultivation of your taste for literary papers will help to make your conversation interesting to those whom you meet in polite society.

J. W. H.—1. Prepared chalk. 2. Yes. 3. Squeezes them out, and bathes with dilute spirits of wine. 4. About the average. 5. Possibly 5 ft. 8 in.

WORLD WEARY.—1. We will read it if you send it, and give our opinion, but we cannot be responsible for the safe custody of the MS. 2. No. 3. No. 4. Certainly.

KITTY.—If you have a good voice you should cultivate it as much as possible, so that when called upon to sing you may do so without hesitation, and add to the enjoyment of the company present.

C. P. G.—Muddy water containing a little albuminous matter can be cleared very effectually by adding a few drops of a solution of alum, and letting it stand still for a few hours. The water so cleared is quite satisfactory for use in washing of all kinds.

P. D. W.—You do wrong to indulge in melancholy musings. A girl of twenty should be bright and vivacious, and look hopefully to the future. Engage in some task that will occupy your leisure time, and the depression of spirits of which you complain will pass away, despite the words of the German poet whom you quote.

W. G. D.—The judge always passes sentence; but formerly, in Scotland, the public executioner repeated over the sentence of the condemned, in the judge's words and then added: "This I pronounce for doom." From this expression he acquired the name of the *doomsday*, and was so called both by the legal profession and the community in general.

MRS. G. L. N.—To make apple jelly, take a dozen good tart apples, cut them into quarters, add a pint of water, and let them simmer about half-an-hour. Set a sieve over an earthen pan, turn the apples into it, and let them drain; but do not stir the apples after the juice is drained out. Let it stand and settle about half-an-hour; then take a pint of the juice to a pound of white sugar, boil it ten minutes, and strain it into moulds or jars.

LADY ADELAIDE.—The "Court of Love" was in France, from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, a tribunal composed of ladies of high birth and talent, who questions of gallantry, and whose decisions were acquiesced in by courtesy. The last imitation of these courts was held at Rueil, it is stated, at the instance of Cardinal Richelieu. The decisions were made according to a code of thirty-one articles, written by Andre, royal chaplain of France, about 1170.

D. F. W.—It would be much better to open communication with your old lover through some friend, whom you may have in common, than to write to him. You would certainly be making an advance in writing, and while nothing attracts a man to a woman so much as to find that she takes an interest in him, nothing repels a man so much as to think that a woman is pursuing him. If there is no indirect way in which you can communicate with your friend, and you should decide to write, your letter should merely tell him that you wished to know, for the sake of old times, how he had prospered.

C. W.—You have perhaps seen pretentious people who, when anything is told them, or a work of art is shown to them, raise their eyebrows in a way to indicate their distrust or disapproval, and also to give the beholder to understand that they know too much to be imposed upon by anything which is not of the very first quality. Such raisers of the eyebrows are supercilious people. The word supercilious comes from Latin words that mean "above the eyelid," or eyebrows. The raising of the eyebrows in the way we have mentioned is a universal mode of expressing disdainful dissent, or contemptuous criticism, and hence the word supercilious. The meaning of the word has been greatly expanded in modern usage, and it is now employed to denote a proud, haughty, arogant, dictatorial, or overbearing manner.

S. S. B.—No personal knowledge of them.

MISS LOTTIE.—The silver articles, if worn, should be replaced.

GEORGINA.—Beef-marrow is used to keep the hair from falling out.

W. T.—We do not give business addresses in these columns.

NED.—April 25, 1844, came on Thursday; April 7, 1848, on Friday.

CONSTANT READER JOE.—Write to the postmaster at the place named.

M. R.—Frequent brushing of the hair back from the forehead may in time have the desired effect.

A. T. O.—Glycerine diluted with water accidulated with fresh lemon juice will whiten and soften the hands.

JOSEPH A. B.—The first Jew admitted to a seat in the House of Commons was Baron L. N. Rothschild. Date, July 26, 1858.

M. M.—1. Your penmanship needs to be improved for office work. Practise writing daily. 2. Still alive. 3. Thanks for your complimentary remarks.

WE'LL MEET AGAIN TO MORROW.

THOUGH now we part,
Yet heart to heart,
We not a care should borrow;
Good-night we sigh,
And not good-bye;
We'll meet again to-morrow.

We meet, we meet—
And oh, my sweet,
May that hour bring no sorrow;
But love's fond bliss,
And kiss for kiss,
When comes the glad to-morrow.

Your eyes so blue,
So bright and true,
With tear-drops now are shining.
Oh! while I thine,
And thou art mine,
Why, darling, this repining?

We meet, we meet,
And oh! my sweet,
May that hour bring no sorrow;
But love's fond bliss,
And kiss for kiss,
When comes that glad to-morrow.

Oh, sweetheart fair,
Without a care,
In bright or stormy weather,
The road begun,
In cloud or sun,
We'll go life's way together.

We meet, we meet,
And oh, how sweet
That hour that brings no sorrow;
My love endure,
So true and sure,
Throughout a long to-morrow.

D. F.

A. A.—None of the rulers now living, selected by the chance of birth, has displayed very great ability. The Emperor of Germany is the ablest.

S. F.—Comols is a term denoting a considerable portion of the debts of Great Britain, known as the three per cent. consolidated annuities. They constitute a transurable stock in which there is daily speculation, and the varying price is taken as an index of the value of other public securities.

A. M.—The best treatment consists of exercise in the open air, moderation in eating and drinking, and care of the general health. Stimulating lotions, like Vaseline's solution, are effective for a time, but they must be used cautiously and sparingly, as they may injure the skin, and are apt to lose their power after frequent use.

G. E. S.—Your embarrassment seems to proceed almost wholly from your consciousness in supposing that either of the young ladies would be glad to accept your proposal, and that the one you should not propose to would be nearly broken-hearted. It may be that neither of them cares anything about you, except as a friend. Your love is not of the genuine kind. If it were, you would have no difficulty in telling who it is you love; and you should not propose marriage to any lady until you are absolutely sure that she is the sole object of your affection.

ANNE.—To clean clothes, dissolve four ounces of washing soda in one quart of boiling water; when dissolved, add to it one moderate sized fresh beef's gall; lay the garment to be cleaned on a clean table or board, and with a sponge or brush (a brush is the best) wetted in the liquid, rub well the grease spots first, and afterward the whole garment, frequently dipping the sponge or brush in the liquid; when sufficiently rubbed, rinse in cold water very thoroughly; then squeeze the water entirely out, but without twisting; if possible, use a potato wringer, shake well, and dry in the air. While drying, shake the garment occasionally, and pull it into shape to prevent shrinking. When still slightly damp, press it on the wrong side with a warm iron, and again air it.

W. B. S.—Nero has always had the bad eminence of being considered the cruelest of the Emperors of Rome.

E. A. A.—Germany just now stands foremost in music and in many branches of science. France is foremost in painting.

P. F. F.—You must take as much exercise in the open air as possible, avoid sugar, all sweet dishes, potatoes, and such dishes as corn starch, farina, and so forth, which consist almost entirely of starch, and only eat just enough of the food you allow yourself. It is unnecessary to warn you that cream and malt liquors are very fattening.

CORDELIA.—To make a lemon pie, grate the rind of two lemons; peel off the white skin; chop the lemon up fine; add two cupsful of sugar; beat up two eggs, and stir it altogether. Roll out a thin paste; line a tin plate with it, and fill it half full with lemon; then roll out another thin crust, cover it, and fill up the plate with the lemon; cover it with a rich puff paste, and bake it twenty minutes.

CARIE.—Nutmeg unites, with the medicinal properties of the ordinary aromatics, considerable narcotic power. In the quantity of two or three drachms, it has been known to produce stupor and delirium; and dangerous if not fatal consequences are said to have followed its free use in India. Mace possesses properties essentially the same with those of nutmeg, and, like that medicine, has been known, when taken in excess, to produce alarming sensations. It is, however, less used as a medicine. The dose of either is from five to twenty grains.

T. W.—The engagement ring is now worn almost invariably on the same finger of the right hand as the wedding ring is on the left, and many people have a quite unreasonable dislike to seeing it worn on the wedding ring finger, though the finger next the little finger of the left hand is decidedly the best to wear a valued ring, for the simple and practical reason that the ring is better protected on that finger than on any other. "Juana" is a Spanish name, and the Spanish pronunciation is "Hw a-nee-tah." "Ju-a-nee-tah," however, will do very well in books and stories written in English.

ERLINE.—The tearing of the argument in pieces, and the taking of an offender in hand, are mental operations, and have to be done with mental instruments—in short, with the mental hands. When we talk about being in the dark on a subject, and about having light thrown upon it, about seeing the point, or not seeing it, about handling a subject, or tearing an argument to pieces, we, of course, speak figuratively, and assign eyes and hands to the mind, and assume that it has mental faculties, organs and conditions which correspond to bodily faculties, organs and conditions.

F. F.—Of course, a sensible, well-bred man will show by his look and manner that he expects to be recognized; but, nevertheless, in this country, the duty of looking out for acquaintances of the opposite sex, and bowing first, falls upon ladies. Even if a man who you know is stupid enough to look at you, you must salute him with a slight bow and smile. The gentleman whom you "cut" would naturally feel hurt, and if ever you see him again you should apologize; but if your acquaintance with him was very slight, it is not worth while taking any trouble about the matter.

Y. W.—Helen, the most beautiful woman of her time, according to Greek legends, and the wife of Menelaus, fled with Paris, the son of Priam, to Troy, and the Trojan war was the consequence. Paris was killed during the siege of Troy, and Helen then married Deiphobus, another son of Priam; but when the city was taken, she treacherously introduced the Greeks into his chamber in order to appease Menelaus, who, on her return to Sparta, forgave her. The accounts of her death differ; one statement attributing it to the Queen of Rhodes, whose husband had been killed in the war. She caused Helen to be seized while bathing, tied to a tree, and strangled.

L. C. B.—Floating islands, so called, are produced by accumulations of drift wood, among which drifting sands and earth collect and form a soil in which plants take root. Masses of these great rafts are occasionally detached and drift off with the small animals, birds, serpents, and alligators that have taken refuge upon them. They are frequently met with on the large rivers of South America, and have been the means of distributing species of animals among the islands of the South Pacific, upon many of which their introduction in any other way is difficult to explain. Such islands have been seen floating a hundred miles off from the mouth of the Ganges; and they also occur in the Malay Archipelago.

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